

## **Glasgow–Peking Higher Education Symposium 2025**

# **Co-Imagining Shared Futures of Higher Education in Diverse Contexts, Histories, Cultures, and Traditions**

**Tuesday, 22 July 2025-09:00 to Wednesday, 23 July 2025-17:00**

Seminar Suite 237C, Advanced Research Centre (ARC),  
University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom

### **Organised by**

School of Education, University of Glasgow & Graduate School of Education,  
Peking University

### **Hosted by**

Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning (CRADALL),  
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### **Supported by**

Glasgow Comparative and International Education Research (GLACIER) Network,  
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## Symposium Co-Chairs' Welcome

We are delighted to welcome you to the first Glasgow-Peking Higher Education symposium.

We chose the theme Co-imagining Shared Futures of Higher Education in Diverse Contexts, Histories, Cultures, and Traditions because we believe that there is a genuine need for Higher Education globally to reimagine and reconfigure itself to better respond to the diverse contexts in which it operates. This includes efforts to decolonise curricula, but also goes beyond this to rethink how different futures can be imagined that encourage and celebrate different sets of values, and how that can generate solutions to both localised and global challenges.

The symposium is designed to include substantial time for discussion, with the specific aim to create opportunities for co-written outputs. Whether you are presenting or participating as an audience member, we hope you will enjoy two days of contributions and discussions and leave with both new ideas and new collaborations.

We hope everyone has a great symposium experience at the University of Glasgow and we look forward to meeting and working with you throughout the symposium.

Anna Wilson, Leping Mou and Wenqin Shen

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## Symposium Theme

Contemporary universities often position themselves as bastions of liberal and critical thinking-places where different cultures and values are explored, understood, and celebrated. Yet,

Universities—or institutions of higher learning—have evolved through rich, complex, and culturally embedded histories that differ significantly across regions and eras. For example, universities in Scotland and England, like many in Europe, have roots in medieval Christian religious institutions and evolved through the European Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. In contrast, modern universities in China were shaped by various Western models but are situated within a tradition of higher learning that traces back to the ancient Chinese academies, which emphasised scholarly authority and strong connections to state service. From the ivory tower to the multiversity, both local factors and global models—especially the rise of the research university—have shaped how universities develop within different contexts. In many countries and regions, indigenous systems of advanced education have been reshaped by experiences of colonialism and the processes of liberation or withdrawal of colonial powers. Narratives of local engagement and cultural relevance—such as the recent promotion of universities as central actors in the development of Learning Cities—further suggest a logic that should both embody and explicitly value diversity and multiple models of the university.

However, there are also powerful forces driving homogenisation, largely shaped by neoliberal imperatives that emphasise global rankings and standardised benchmarks for research universities.

Scholars such as Hayes have long expressed concerns about the so-called McDonaldization of higher education: a fourfold drive toward efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control. In recent decades, global policy actors such as the OECD and UNESCO have promoted comparative frameworks that implicitly endorse a single version of educational quality and institutional value.

Discourses of mobility have led to standardisation in degree structures, disciplinary frameworks, and institutional models. The impact of digitalisation further normalises a particular set of practices and (capitalist) values, while the encroachment of for-profit “service” providers—from publishing houses to technology companies such as Amazon—further erases difference. These trends not only reinforce the image of the “university-as-factory,” but also suggest the emergence of a new form of coloniality.

The dangers of biodiversity loss are well understood in ecological systems. Similarly, this symposium invites participants to consider the causes of assimilation and the erasure of diversity in higher education, and to imagine what a future landscape might look like—one that actively embraces and embodies diversity, multiculturalism, and pluralism.

As a collaboration between the University of Glasgow and Peking University, the symposium will feature keynote plenary panels with leading scholars and researchers working in this area. It will also serve as an inclusive space for intellectual exchange, showcasing research from

early career researchers and graduate students. The programme will include both presentations and active discussions, with the aim of producing one or more co-authored position papers as direct outputs, and an edited book with the Manchester University Press (currently at the proposal stage). We welcome contributions that address the core questions outlined above. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity: reimagining university structures, teaching, and research
- Universities and local/indigenous knowledges
- Technological hegemony and strategies for resistance or avoidance
- Alternative values of higher education and ways of measuring or expressing them
- Tensions between internationalisation and local relevance/service
- Contested issues in internationalisation of higher education and academic mobility
- The roles and outcomes of higher education in the age of AI

## Programme Outline

### Day 1 – Tuesday, 22 July 2025

|             |                                      |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| 09:00–09:30 | Coffee and Registration              |
| 09:30–09:45 | Conference Opening / Welcome Remarks |

#### **Theme 1: Higher Education in a Digital World**

|             |                     |
|-------------|---------------------|
| 09:45–10:30 | Keynote             |
| 10:35–11:15 | Paper Presentations |
| 11:15–11:30 | Coffee Break        |
| 11:30–12:10 | Group Discussions   |
| 12:10–13:00 | Lunch               |

#### **Theme 2: Spaces, Policies, and Resources of Higher Education**

|             |                     |
|-------------|---------------------|
| 13:00–13:40 | Panel               |
| 13:45–14:25 | Paper Presentations |
| 14:30–15:10 | Group Discussions   |
| 15:10–15:25 | Coffee Break        |

#### **Theme 3: Student Experience, Agency, and Outcome of Higher Education**

|             |                                    |
|-------------|------------------------------------|
| 15:25–16:05 | Panel                              |
| 16:10–16:50 | Paper Presentations                |
| 16:55–17:30 | Group Discussions                  |
| 17:30–19:00 | Poster Session and Drinks / Snacks |

### Day 2 – Wednesday, 23 July 2025

|             |                         |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| 09:00–09:30 | Coffee and Registration |
|-------------|-------------------------|

#### **Theme 4: Co-Imagining Futures from Diverse Contexts and Traditions**

|             |                     |
|-------------|---------------------|
| 09:30–10:10 | Panel               |
| 10:15–11:10 | Paper Presentations |
| 11:00–11:20 | Coffee Break        |
| 11:20–11:50 | Group Discussions   |

#### **Theme 5: Internationalization amid (De)Globalization and Challenges**

|             |                        |
|-------------|------------------------|
| 11:50–12:45 | Panel                  |
| 12:45–13:30 | Lunch                  |
| 13:30–14:25 | Paper Presentations    |
| 14:30–15:00 | Group Discussion       |
| 15:00–15:15 | Coffee Break           |
| 15:15–15:55 | Panel Discussion       |
| 16:00–16:45 | Collaborative Planning |
| 16:45–17:00 | Closing Remarks        |

## Programme Schedule Day 1 (22 July)

### Theme 1: Higher Education in a Digital World

| Time        | Paper Title   | Authors/Presenters                   | Format                    | No. | Page |
|-------------|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----|------|
| 09:45-10:30 | <u><i>Speculatively Re-Imagining Digital Futures for Learning</i></u>                   | Jen Ross                             | <b>Keynote</b>            | 01  | 9    |
| 10:35-11:15 | <u><i>Educating Humans for a Machine World: The New Mandate of Higher Education</i></u> | Umar Adam Ibrahim, Nurbol Aidarbayev | <b>Paper Presentation</b> | 02  | 10   |
|             | <u><i>Higher Education and Third Mission: How, For Whom and Why</i></u>                 | Bahar Cemre Karaagacli               |                           | 03  | 12   |

### Theme 2: Spaces, Policies, and Resources of Higher Education

|             |  |                 |                           |    |    |
|-------------|--|-----------------|---------------------------|----|----|
| 13:00-13:40 | <u><i>Place-Based Higher Education in the Anthropocene</i></u>                                 | Anna Wilson     | <b>Panel</b>              | 04 | 14 |
|             | <u><i>Higher Education and Industrial Clusters in China: A Quintuple-Helix Perspective</i></u> | Wei Ha          |                           | 05 | 16 |
| 13:45-14:25 | <u><i>Accountability to Students through Representation in the UK</i></u>                      | Qian Jiang      | <b>Paper Presentation</b> | 06 | 17 |
|             | <u><i>Quality Assurance in Transnational Higher Education in GBA</i></u>                       | Colin Keyu Zhai |                           | 07 | 18 |

### Theme 3: Pathways and Experiences of Higher Education

|             |   |                 |                           |    |    |
|-------------|---|-----------------|---------------------------|----|----|
| 15:25-16:05 | <u><i>Liberal Arts Education in a Technologized World</i></u>   | Leping Mou      | <b>Panel</b>              | 08 | 19 |
|             | <u><i>Mental Health and Spatial Heterogeneity</i></u>           | Colin Keyu Zhai |                           | 09 | 20 |
| 16:10-16:50 | <u><i>Reflexive Agency in Chinese Students' Transitions</i></u> | Yu Hao          | <b>Paper Presentation</b> | 10 | 21 |

|             |  |                           |               |    |    |
|-------------|--|---------------------------|---------------|----|----|
|             | <u><i>Social Class, Geographic Origin, and Inequality in International Education</i></u> | Danchen Yan               |               | 11 | 23 |
| 17:30-19:00 | <u><i>Brazil's Science without Borders Program</i></u>                                   | Ícaro de Oliveira Rosa    | <b>Poster</b> | 23 | 46 |
|             | <u><i>Sino-Swiss STEMM Collaboration Patterns</i></u>                                    | Xiaona Wang & Alis Oancea |               | 24 | 48 |
|             | <u><i>ChatGPT and International HE</i></u>   | Anan Chen                 |               | 25 | 49 |
|             | <u><i>Academic Performativity in Malaysia</i></u>  | Nur Izham                 |               | 26 | 51 |
|             | <u><i>Early-Career Academics in China and Scotland</i></u>                               | Lu Li                     |               | 27 | 53 |
|             | <u><i>Challenging Deficit Narratives</i></u>   | Huiyang Lyu               |               | 28 | 55 |



## Programme Schedule Day 2 (23 July)

### Theme 4: Co-Imagining Futures from Diverse Contexts and Traditions

| Time        | Paper Title  | Authors/Presenters | Format                    | No. | Page |
|-------------|--|--------------------|---------------------------|-----|------|
| 09:30-10:10 | <u><i>Catholic Intellectual Traditions</i></u>       | Stephen McKinney   | <b>Panel</b>              | 12  | 25   |
|             | <u><i>Liberal Arts and Deweyan Democracy</i></u>     | Leonard Waks       |                           | 13  | 26   |
| 10:15-11:10 | <u><i>Decolonial Curricular Practices</i></u>        | Dustin Hosseini    | <b>Paper Presentation</b> | 14  | 27   |
|             | <u><i>Critical Relationality in HE</i></u>           | Haley Sneed        |                           | 15  | 32   |
|             | <u><i>Inclusion of Indigenous Epistemologies</i></u> | Zheng Ma           |                           | 16  | 35   |

### Theme 5: Internationalization amid (De)Globalization and Challenges

|             |  |                            |                           |    |    |
|-------------|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|----|----|
| 11:50-12:45 | <u><i>Ethical Partnerships in Global HE</i></u>                      | Miguel Lim                 | <b>Panel</b>              | 17 | 37 |
|             | <u><i>Paradox of Overseas Degrees in Post-2020 China</i></u>         | Wenqin Shen                |                           | 18 | 38 |
|             | <u><i>Re-orientalising China in Internationalisation Studies</i></u> | Benjamin Mulvey            |                           | 19 | 39 |
| 13:30-14:25 | <u><i>Returnee Academics in Joint Venture Universities</i></u>       | Bowen Zhang                | <b>Paper Presentation</b> | 20 | 40 |
|             | <u><i>Chinese Students and Generative AI</i></u>                     | Zhixi Li                   |                           | 21 | 41 |
|             | <u><i>Cross-Cultural Supervision Challenges</i></u>                  | Liyuan Zhuang & Colin Mack |                           | 22 | 42 |

## Theme 1: Higher Education in A Digital World

01

### *Keynote*

#### **Speculatively Re-Imagining Digital Futures for Learning**

Jen Ross, University of Edinburgh, UK

Jen Ross is Professor of Digital Culture and Education Futures at the University of Edinburgh, where she is co-director of the Centre for Research in Digital Education. Her research interests include education and cultural heritage futures, emerging technologies (including Generative AI), open and online education, and the intersections of surveillance and trust. Her 2023 book, *Digital Futures for Learning* (Routledge), explores speculative approaches to researching and teaching about the future.

**Theme:** *Higher Education in a Digital World*

High-tech, super-efficient, personalised higher education keeps moving just out of reach, despite decades of predictions about how educational technology will deliver it. Why is that? The current moment is instructive, as waves of possibilities, promises and threats about AI in education crash over us. AI's benefits are said to be just ahead in the shape of a transformed, streamlined, or perhaps just *better* university. Meanwhile, the costs of those promises (human and environmental) are being paid now in the form of the energy demands made by large language models and generative technologies, and demands made on education professionals to change and “keep up”. The specifics may be new, but we keep going on a similar journey of technological innovation in higher education, one that does not, and (thankfully) cannot, reach its promised destination. We need instead to go somewhere else, and to do that we need other ways of paying attention to other futures, and other things that might be under the surface, over the horizon, or behind us. This talk makes the case for playful, imaginative, speculative methods and pedagogies for encountering the diversity, complexity and multiplicity of what is not-yet.

## **Educating Humans for a Machine World: The New Mandate of Higher Education**

*Umar Adam Ibrahim, Nurbol Aidarbayev, Greg Thomas Hay (SDU University, Kazakhstan)*

**Theme:** *Higher Education in a Digital World*

As technology continues to grow rapidly, especially with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation, the world we live and work in is changing fast. Many jobs are being reshaped or replaced by machines, creating new demands for skills that complement AI capabilities. In this evolving landscape, higher education faces a new and urgent challenge: preparing people not just to keep up with machines, but to thrive alongside them in a future where humans and machines must work together. This paper explores the idea that higher education must fundamentally rethink its purpose and methods to better match these realities. Traditionally, colleges and universities have focused on teaching specific technical knowledge or professional skills. However, as machines become increasingly adept at tasks requiring speed, memory, and analysis, human abilities such as creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration become ever more important for working with and alongside AI. Essential human traits like emotional intelligence and lifelong learning are difficult for machines to replicate and are key to remaining relevant.

Furthermore, the emergence of AI highlights the critical need for AI literacy, which is defined as the capacity to critically understand, evaluate, and apply AI technologies responsibly, even without the ability to create AI models independently [1]. This literacy encompasses understanding AI's strengths and limitations, responsible use, critical assessment of its value [1], and developing skills like prompt literacy [1]. Education must therefore shift its focus from solely training for specific jobs to developing a well-rounded, adaptable, thoughtful, and responsible person who can solve complex problems and work effectively with both people and technology.

This paper argues that effective preparation requires combining technical literacy with a strong foundation in the humanities, critical thinking, and ethics, advocating for a human-centered framework for AI in education (AIED) [2]. Students need technical understanding while also engaging critically with the societal impacts of AI, addressing issues of fairness, data privacy, algorithmic bias, accountability, and reliability of AI outputs [1][2].

To cultivate these essential skills and navigate the complexities of AI, innovative pedagogical approaches and technologies are necessary [3][4]. Methods such as cyber-social teaching [1] and fostering collaborative intelligence by augmenting teamwork activities with AI tools can enhance learning [1][2]. These pedagogies should aim for deeper learning experiences beyond mere personalization [2], promote inclusion and diversity [2], and emphasize critical evaluation of AI-generated content alongside human insights [1]. The role of the educator is

also evolving, moving from the primary source of knowledge to guiding students and leveraging AI to augment their own capabilities and teaching practices [2].

In conclusion, the mission of higher education is undergoing a significant shift. It is no longer sufficient to focus solely on creating workers; the new mandate is to shape individuals equipped with crucial human-centric skills, AI literacy, and an ethical framework [1][4]who can effectively collaborate with AI and critically navigate its complexities and potential perils [2]. This transformation presents a powerful opportunity to build a more meaningful education system for the future, one that ensures AI serves educational goals while safeguarding the deeply human essence of learning [2].

## References

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[4] Satish K. (2023) Developing Human Skills in the Era of Artificial Intelligence: Challenges and Opportunities for Education and Training. Scholedge International Journal of *Multidisciplinary & Allied Studies*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.19085/sijmas100201>

## Higher Education and Third Mission: How, For Whom and Why

*Bahar Cemre Karaagacli (University of Glasgow, UK)*

**Key Words:** *Higher education, Comparative study, Third Mission, Impact*

**Theme:** *Higher Education in a Digital World*

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have expanded their missions with more emphasis on developmental roles. Regarding these developmental roles, universities are expected to be more socially responsible, supportive of sustainable development and social innovation (Barth et al., 2015; Georghiou, 2018; Sørensen et al, 2019). Also, third mission activities carry importance for social and economic value creation to see the reality behind “re-integration of the economy in society” (Hochgerner, 2011, p.12). As a recurring question, it is highly crucial to ask for whom values are generated at HEIs and what impacts those values have led to. Accordingly, this study looks into policy scripts on third mission, in specific entrepreneurialism and engagement, and scrutinises social and economic developmental roles. While answering the research question of “how and why have regionally oriented HEIs adopted entrepreneurial and engagement-related practices and related developmental roles?”, the comparative design employs document analysis and semi-structured interviews at two awarded, regionally engaged entrepreneurial HEIs from the German and British higher education systems. To reveal developmental roles, interviews were conducted with the internal stakeholders who are management-based staff and officers who take responsibility for engagement or entrepreneurship activities, academics who have pursued entrepreneurship or engagement activities in their region and students who have got entrepreneurial aspirations. The analysis followed two stages: the codebook analysis with the lens of sociological neo-institutional theory and template analysis with inductive and deductive coding cycles. Through comparative analytical framework, ideational and material factors were scrutinised. Accordingly, this framework depicted idiosyncrasies and peculiarities across these HEIs from British and German higher education systems. One of the key findings revealed that third mission at these HEIs is oriented to common social and economic developmental roles regardless of system-based differences. Economic developmental roles such as human capital formation for the region, increasing job opportunities through start-up creation or social developmental roles through social innovation/civic engagement showed the main contributions of entrepreneurialism and engagement. However, sector realities and resource dependencies illustrated differences across these HEIs. Context-specific funding opportunities showed resource dependency in a divergent manner. For instance, the English HEI faces diminishing support of the political bodies for entrepreneurship while the German federal and regional political authorities reinforce startup creation with specific funding streams. With regard to engagement, civil society becomes a crucial partner, but with

different collaboration modes and aims. Despite the isomorphic tendencies of third mission, peculiarities serve as a reminder of the deep connection to the local circumstances.

### Place-Based Higher Education in the Anthropocene

Anna Wilson (University of Glasgow)

We live in a world ever more visibly shaped by humanity, so much so that we now describe ourselves as living in the Anthropocene epoch (see, e.g., Crutzen, 2006; Steffen et al., 2011). Both our efforts to progress and flourish as a species and our competition for power and resources have changed lives, cultures and landscapes. Over time, our extraction of material and energy from our environment and our construction of the infrastructures that enable modern life have changed the planet in ways that we are only now recognizing, including loss of biodiversity, climate change and the ubiquitous distribution of plastics through our waters, air, soils and bodies. The impacts of these changes are not equally distributed, and we have yet to make the collective shifts that might be required to slow or even stop them.

At the same time as we are coming to view ourselves as dependent upon and co-evolving with our environments, our understandings of each other and our awareness of and attitudes to difference are changing – sometimes leading to more tolerance and inclusivity (see, e.g., Bollinger, 1988), but also sometimes producing counter-currents of fear and resentment of the “other” (see, e.g., Rodrik, 2021).

Universities have played crucial roles in all of this: in generating the technologies that have allowed us to change the planet; in recognising and measuring the ways the planet is changing; in critiquing social norms; and in creating spaces to think differently. Our research has supported medicinal, scientific, engineering, social and cultural change. Our education has helped spread the knowledge we have generated and encouraged aspirations for improved quality of life. Over recent decades, Higher Education (HE) has internationalised and globalised in ways that raise intercultural understanding but also, perhaps unintentionally, normalise and even promote a set of values that largely originate from the Global North/West. International comparisons and league tables imply that HE should be sufficiently similar to *be* comparable, wherever it is. Mobility agendas equally imply that students and staff should be able to quickly adapt to and function within new institutions, again implying fundamental similarity. In this paper, I explore whether, as both the physical and political climates of different places experience increasingly dramatic changes and differentiation, there might be a need to re-diversify HE.

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## **How does higher education resources facilitate the formation and development of industrial clusters in the Chinese solar-panel industry? A quintuple-helix perspective**

Wei Ha & Haoran Wang (Peking University)

Professor Ha Wei is the Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Education Policy and Administration at the Graduate School of Education, Peking University. He specializes in impact evaluation of education policies in China. In recent years, his research interest concentrates on the effects of constructing new university campuses on local social and economic development in China. He received his BA and MA from Peking University and his Ph.D. from Harvard Kennedy School. Prior to joining PKU, he served as policy specialist and senior policy specialist with UNDP and UNICEF in the US and in Africa for almost seven years. He frequently consults with Asian Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and UN agencies. Since 2023, he has served as the Associate Editor of International Journal of Education Development and as a member on the editorial board of Education Finance and Policy.

**Key words:** Triple Helix; Quintuple-Helix; Innovative-driven Development; Regional Innovation System.

**Theme:** Spaces, Policies, and Resources of Higher Education

In recent years, the development of regional innovation systems has emerged as a key strategy for countries worldwide to secure a competitive advantage in national development. Building upon recent advancements in the Triple Helix theory, this study proposes a Quintuple-Helix theoretical model adapted to China's specific national context and conducts an in-depth case analysis using the photovoltaic (PV) industry as an example. Broadly speaking, the development trajectory of China's PV industry exemplifies the synergistic interaction among the five helix actors, forming an upward spiral path characterized by “policy guidance – technological innovation – industrial integration – capital empowerment.” Regionally, the formation of China's Quintuple-Helix innovation ecosystem demonstrates marked spatial heterogeneity. Accordingly, the construction of a successful regional innovation ecosystem should be aligned with local resource endowments and industrial characteristics. For example, a technology-driven Quintuple-Helix model necessitates the enhancement of the technology transfer system; a market-driven model requires stronger integration among industry, academia, and research institutions; a government-driven model should focus on nurturing market-oriented innovation entities; and an interaction-led model calls for the establishment of a multi-level, collaborative innovation framework.

## **Accountability of Universities to Students Through Student Representation in the UK: Discretion, Governance, and Bureaucracy**

Qian Jiang, University of Glasgow

**Theme:** *Spaces, Policies, and Resources of Higher Education*

This thesis aims to investigate higher education institutions (HEIs)' accountability to students through the channel of student representation in the UK context. Resonating with the imperatives of New Public Management (NPM), the predominant focus of student voice discourse in UK HE is its role in facilitating quality assurance. Student representation, as a formally institutionalised channel for student voice in UK HE, has not received considerable attention in scholarly research. Therefore, it remains unclear and untheorised in terms of how student representatives work to represent student voice and to what degree they contribute to HEIs' accountability to students.

Underpinned by the conceptual framework comprised of NPM and its relevant concepts (e.g., marketisation), questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand the extent to which HEIs are accountable to students through student representation. Participants are student representatives from UK HEIs across England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Data was collected through 120 questionnaires and 16 interviews, including 154 cases of voice representation that are extracted from the qualitative data. Despite a wide range of student voices represented by student representatives, the findings suggest that student representation does not serve as a reliable and effective channel for holding UK HEIs accountable to students. The extent to which UK HEIs are accountable to students through student representation is highly contingent on student representatives' discretion (e.g., filtering, mediation), the compatibility of student voices with institutional governance (e.g., managerial chain, temporal issues), and the bureaucratic structure of student representation (e.g., power asymmetry among student representatives).

By identifying these three dimensions (discretion, governance, and bureaucracy), this study makes important theoretical contributions by enriching our understandings of student representation and unveiling in what ways UK HEIs' accountability to students is achieved and constrained through it. Practically, the findings could inform student organisations, HEIs, policymakers and other student voice mechanisms of how student representation is utilised for the purposes of meeting managerialist needs under the influence of NPM.

## Quality Assurance in Transnational Higher Education in GBA

Colin Keyu Zhai, Lingnan University

This research seeks to develop the quality assurance (QA) framework to effectively evaluate Hong Kong's transnational higher education (TNHE) collaboratively established by Hong Kong in China's Greater Bay Area (GBA), to gain a comprehensive assessment of its TNHE performance. Affected by China's aggravating youth unemployment rate and the fierce competition in labour market, a growing number of Chinese students determine to pursue TNHE within Mainland China in which it is the top host country for international branch campuses (IBCs). We particularly focus on Hong Kong's TNHE, because the expansion of Hong Kong's TNHE in GBA has created a need to build capacity for QA agencies. However, knowledge on Hong Kong's IBCs, particularly on QA issues, has been rarely acquired.

Specifically, to bridge the gaps, the project initially builds a theoretical framework to conceptually explain TNHE QA in GBA (objective one), comprehensively develops a robust QA assessment framework (objective two) and dynamically improves it through the practical case study in China's GBA (objective three). Through achieving the three objectives, this project will contribute to the thorough academic understandings and practical implications for enhancing the quality of Hong Kong's TNHE, because the QA and TNHE sustainability enhancement can become a guarantee for solidifying the role of Hong Kong's international education hub.

A large-scale mixed-method study will be proposed to generate new empirical data and advanced knowledge in the areas of QA of TNHE. We will collect the first-hand data through interviews and second-hand data through relevant laws, policy documents, official archives, statistical yearbooks, governmental guidelines and planning. Content analysis, logistic principal component analysis and deep learning will be employed to analyse the collected data. Beyond the general and mainstreamed practices of TNHE's QA frameworks, this project aims at developing a targeted framework for Hong Kong's TNHE in GBA. Conceptually and theoretically, the project will contribute to the current debates on the unfulfilled theoretical support, on the scarcity of indicator framework design, on crisis in the practical evaluation operation in a specific region as well as the needs of a dynamical mechanism for sustaining TNHE. The analytical findings can inform not only academic debates but provide some useful knowledge for multiple stakeholders participating in Hong Kong's TNHE as well as regional and local policy makers in GBA.

### Theme 3: Student Experience, Agency, and Outcome of Higher Education

08

#### Liberal Arts Education in a Technologized World

Leping Mou (University of Glasgow)

**Theme:** *Pathways and Experiences of Higher Education*

Liberal arts education, as a model of higher education that emphasizes students' holistic development, has been widely praised for its cognitive and social outcomes across a range of competencies. However, few studies have systematically examined the mechanisms through which these outcomes are achieved—particularly in non-Western contexts where liberal arts models are being adapted and innovated to meet the demands of a technology- and skills-focused world. This study adopts a sequential mixed-methods design, drawing on multiple data sources including institutional documents, interviews with faculty members and administrators, surveys, and follow-up interviews with students and alumni. It investigates how the liberal arts education model operates through the lens of the capabilities approach in two East Asian universities. By integrating data from diverse sources, the findings reveal that liberal arts education—anchored in the value of “whole person development” within East Asian cultural contexts—fosters students' long-term growth in areas such as character formation, autonomy and agency, decision-making, and lifelong learning. This study contributes to higher education research by offering insights into teaching and learning practices that aim to cultivate well-rounded individuals equipped with the capabilities needed in an increasingly technologized world.

## **Spatial Heterogeneity and Promotion of Chinese University Students' Mental Health**

Colin Keyu Zhai (Lingnan University)

This study aims to explore the spatial heterogeneity in the mental health of Chinese university students and identify effective strategies for promoting their mental well-being. By examining the variations across different regions and university settings, the research seeks to provide insights into the factors that influence mental health and propose tailored interventions. Quantitative data were collected and analysed. A stratified random sample of 4339 university students from different regions of China was surveyed using standardized mental health questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS). Then, the structural equation model (SEM) will be employed to analyse the collected data to investigate the effects of students' socioeconomic factors on their mental health. More importantly, spatial analysis techniques will also be used to map the distribution of mental health issues and identify patterns of spatial heterogeneity. The study found significant spatial heterogeneity in the mental health of Chinese university students. Students in urban areas reported higher levels of stress and anxiety compared to those in rural areas, while students in elite universities exhibited higher levels of academic pressure. Key factors influencing mental health included academic workload, social support, and access to mental health services. The findings have important implications for policymakers and university administrators, highlighting the need for region-specific mental health interventions and the promotion of supportive environments. Universities should develop tailored mental health programs that consider the unique needs of students in different regions and settings. The research also calls for increased collaboration between educational institutions and mental health professionals to create comprehensive support systems.

## **Exploring Reflexive Agency and Self-Formation in International Students' Transitions from High Schools in China to Universities in Anglophone settings: A Longitudinal Multiple Case Study**

Yu (Claire) Hao (University of Oxford)

**Theme:** *Pathways and Experiences of Higher Education*

This study investigates how international students from different types of high schools in China navigate the transition to undergraduate study in the UK, US, and Canada, focusing on the development of reflexive agency and self-formation. Existing research on international students' transitions often emphasises academic or linguistic adjustment, but less is known about how students reflectively negotiate identity, belonging, and becoming during their transitions through longitudinal research. By conceptualising transition as a reflexive and relational process (Montgomery, 2010), this study foregrounds students' active role in making sense of themselves and their social worlds across time and space.

Drawing on the theoretical lens of student self-formation (Marginson, 2014, 2024), the research explores: 1) How do Chinese international students demonstrate reflexive agency and engage in self-formation during their transition from high schools in China to universities in Anglophone settings? 2) What structures and practices can better support international students' reflexive agency and self-formation during their transitions?

The one-year study adopts a longitudinal, qualitative, multi-case, and multi-perspective design, following eight students from four types of high schools through their first year at university abroad. Data were collected through bi-termly semi-structured interviews and monthly self-paced journals. Twelve parents and five school counsellors were also interviewed to provide a multi-perspective understanding of students' experiences. This design enabled the capture of transition as an unfolding, iterative process shaped by students' previous school experiences, linguistic repertoires, and dynamic social contexts.

Findings reveal that students' self-formation was enacted through navigating unfamiliar academic expectations, forming social connections, and making meaning of difference and changes. Reflexive agency was exercised as students engaged in regular exploration of their sense of self, personalised and selective practices from both home and host cultures, and cultivated new modes of social participation. International students demonstrated agency in forming peer relationships and negotiated a sense of self through reflective practices and strategic positioning in higher education spaces. These reflexive processes were enabled or constrained by institutional environments, previous exposure to cultural diversity, and the emotional support available through family, alumni, and friend networks.

The study contributes to international higher education research by conceptualising student transition not merely as adaptation, but as a formative space of becoming. It calls for more holistic and collaborative efforts from both high schools and higher education institutions that foster critical reflection, intercultural engagement, and tailored support for understanding international students' diverse backgrounds and their emerging needs.

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## **Social Class, Geographic Origin, and Inequality in International Education: Exploring Chinese International Students' Transitions and Motivation in UK Higher Education**

Danchen Yan (University of Glasgow)

**Keywords:** International Student Mobility; Social Class; Urban Stratification in China; Transnational Higher Education

**Theme:** *Pathways and Experiences of Higher Education*

Higher education, rather than being inherently equitable, remains conspicuously biased towards certain social groups. This is particularly evident in transnational higher education, where students rely heavily on substantial financial resources to complete their academic studies. However, access does not equate to opportunity.

This study explores how social class and geographic origin shape the transition opportunities, academic experiences, and career aspirations of Chinese international students in the UK. It compares students from first-tier cities (e.g., Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou), who often possess greater exposure to global education and stronger social capital, with students from third-tier cities and below, who typically face greater adaptation challenges and resource constraints. China's urban stratification and the household registration (Hukou) system continue to influence students' access to educational resources, financial support, and social networks, which in turn affect their academic expectations, cultural integration, and post-graduation trajectories.

Theoretically, this study draws on Bourdieu's concepts of social, cultural, and economic capital to analyse how structural inequality shapes educational outcomes. Marxist theories of class reproduction offer insight into the persistent nature of socio-economic disparities in transnational education. In addition, Confucian values—such as filial piety, academic meritocracy, and collectivism—are used to understand how deeply rooted cultural beliefs shape students' motivations, self-perceptions, and responses to challenges abroad.

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach. It combines qualitative semi-structured interviews with 30 Chinese postgraduate students across various UK universities, and a questionnaire survey completed by over 200 respondents from diverse city-tier backgrounds.

Findings show that while students from lower-tier cities often rely on self-discipline and internalised Confucian ideals of perseverance and duty to overcome structural disadvantages, their peers from more privileged urban backgrounds tend to benefit from greater flexibility,



social capital, and global exposure. These dynamics highlight the complex interplay between structural inequality and cultural values in shaping international education experiences.

This research contributes to comparative and international education by showing how China's internal social stratifications and cultural traditions intersect with global mobility. It calls for more culturally responsive and socially inclusive policies that support a broader range of student experiences in transnational education.

## Theme 4: Co-Imagining Futures from Diverse Contexts and Traditions

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### Catholic Intellectual Traditions

Stephen McKinney (University of Glasgow)

**Theme:** *Co-Imagining Futures from Diverse Contexts and Traditions*

This paper examines the very close connections between the bishop of Glasgow and Glasgow medieval Cathedral and the foundation and early years of the University of Glasgow. Amid a wave of universities being founded across Europe in the fifteenth century, the university was founded in 1451 by papal bull, and there remained a very close connection with the bishops who were automatically Chancellors of the university. Most of the early masters and students were clerics or student priests and the university routine was closely linked with the Cathedral. The paper will draw out the many connections between the early life of the university and the Church.

### Three Models for the Renewal of Liberal Education

Leonard Waks (Temple University)

**Theme:** *Co-Imagining Futures from Diverse Contexts and Traditions*

This paper explores three models of liberal education—classical Greek, Confucian, and Deweyan—each offering distinct visions of human development, moral formation, and civic preparation.

The classical liberal arts tradition, as it emerged in ancient Athens and was preserved through the Hellenistic world and medieval Europe, emphasized literary cultivation aimed at shaping the moral and rhetorical capacities of free citizens. This tradition privileged the close study of canonical texts for their stylistic and ethical insights, preparing students for later participation in public life.

By contrast, the Confucian education model, rooted in the ritual and literary heritage of the Zhou dynasty, centered on self-cultivation through reverential engagement with classical texts and ritual practice. Its aim was not only intellectual and moral refinement but also the transformation of character into that of the *junzi*—a noble person of exemplary virtue capable of restoring social harmony. In this model, learning is inseparable from ethical practice and communal ritual.

The third model, articulated by John Dewey, critiques both classical and Confucian frameworks for their reliance on static traditions and elite detachment. Dewey's pragmatic approach grounds liberal education in experiential learning and democratic participation. For Dewey, knowledge arises through problem-solving in socially meaningful contexts; books and classical works serve only insofar as they support active inquiry. True liberal education, in this view, begins with doing and culminates in reflective reconstruction of experience. Dewey's model offers a synthesis: neither narrowly vocational nor aristocratically humanistic, but morally engaged, socially situated, and dynamically experimental. The paper suggests that while close reading of and reflection on important books retains a major role, Dewey's approach offers a promising path for reviving the civic and moral aims of liberal education in contemporary institutions, where the campus itself might become a site of democratic formation through collaborative inquiry, speech, and action.

## Countering neoliberal logic within curricular practices in the social sciences: a look to decolonial thinking for one potential future

Donnesh Dustin Hosseini (University of Glasgow/University of Strathclyde/University of Cumbria)

**Keywords:** decolonising education; education futures; social sciences; dialogue

**Theme:** *Co-Imagining Futures from Diverse Contexts and Traditions*

Drawing on decolonial thinking (Smith, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021), this paper critiques prevailing educational practices, highlighting how neoliberal curricular approaches maintain hegemonic structures by privileging universal standards and impersonal objectivity (Grosfoguel, 2013; Shahjahan, 2016). These structures marginalize diverse epistemologies, ontologies, and lived experiences (Lugones, 2007; Quijano, 2007a, 2007b). To challenge this status quo, the author advocates for educational transformations informed by Ubuntu pedagogy and Indigenous epistemologies, emphasizing relational accountability, respectful representation, reciprocal appropriation, and rights and regulation (Dennis, 2018). These principles encourage a holistic and pluralistic rehumanization of educational practices, fostering genuine dialogue, collaboration, and the collective sharing of knowledge (Freire, 2000; hooks, 2003).

Neoliberalism, characterized by the pervasive economization of all facets of human and non-human existence (Brown, 2015; Mbembe, 2016; Raworth, 2017), maintains and reinforces colonial structures through the ideological framing of *homo oeconomicus*—rational economic individuals primarily driven by market logic (Wynter, 2003; Brown, 2015). This ideological paradigm systematically atomizes humanity, privileging individualism, competition, and efficiency over community, collaboration, and holistic well-being, thus perpetuating divisions that Fanon identifies as zones of being and nonbeing (Fanon, 1967; Wynter, 2003). Higher education in the social sciences is particularly influenced by neoliberal logic through curricular and assessment practices which individualize accountability, prioritize managerial control, and reinforce Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies (Ball, 2021; Holmwood, 2018). Such practices dehumanize educators and students, as knowledge production becomes commodified, standardized, and stripped of emotional and relational elements (hooks, 2003; Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

Two imaginative educational practices are proposed as alternative futures: firstly, involving students in the co-creation of assessments thereby disrupting hierarchical power dynamics and embracing collaborative, community-oriented learning experiences; secondly, disrupting the group-audience binary by introducing recorded dialogues such as podcasts as alternative assessment formats, honoring oral traditions and storytelling to facilitate deeper engagement, reduce performance pressures, and validate diverse forms of knowledge.

Ultimately, the paper argues for a profound rethinking of social science education to break away from coloniality embedded within neoliberal logic. By embracing pluriversal and inclusive approaches that recognize the interconnectedness of humans and non-humans, educators can resist the prevailing commodification of education and actively contribute to a more equitable, humane, and sustainable future (Raworth, 2017; Stein et al., 2020). This decolonial educational praxis aims not only at transforming curricular practices but also at re-envisioning humanity's collective relationship with each other and the planet.

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***Critical Relationality in Higher Education: Learning from Youth Work to Reimagine Inclusion, Care, and Community Engagement***

Haley Sneed (University of Glasgow)

**Keywords:** Higher education futures; Critical relationality; Youth work; Community engagement; Inclusion; Participation

**Theme:** *Co-Imagining Futures from Diverse Contexts and Traditions*

This paper explores how higher education might reimagine its civic role and relational practices by learning from youth work and community-based methodologies. Drawing on participatory research with young people in post-COVID-19 Scotland, it argues for critical relationality as a guiding principle for resisting the individualising, extractive tendencies of neoliberal higher education and fostering inclusive, trust-based futures rooted in care, place, and community.

In the Scottish context, youth wellbeing has become a growing policy priority (Scottish Government, 2023), yet young people's voices remain marginalised within both educational and civic policy processes. Too often, participation is reduced to storytelling, invited as a form of visibility but disconnected from power, shared analysis, or meaningful change (Ahmed, 2021; Wexler & Eglinton, 2024). This research was based in a grassroots youth work setting and employed photovoice, photo-elicitation, and stakeholder dialogue (Aldridge, 2016; Wang & Burris, 1997), creating space for young people to articulate how they experience and understand wellbeing, belonging, and change in structurally neglected communities. Framed by critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000), empowerment theory (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995), and feminist theories of care and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1984), the study highlighted the relational and political dimensions of participation. It revealed how young people co-create forms of support and solidarity that challenge dominant deficit-based models of wellbeing (Piggott, 2010; YouthLink Scotland, 2023).

Three key insights emerged:

1. Youth work offers under-recognised models of place-based care, solidarity, and collective responsibility, which challenge the dominant, marketised logic of higher education (Tett et al., 2017).
2. Participation without structural responsiveness risks reproducing tokenism, particularly when youth voice is extracted but not acted upon.

3. Critical relationality, grounded in care ethics, emotional labour, and mutual accountability, offers a framework for rethinking inclusion, participation, and engagement across university settings.

Rather than advocating for the wholesale adoption of youth work models, the paper invites higher education institutions to partner with youth workers, young people, and communities in ways that centre local knowledge, long-term relationships, and shared power. This shift aligns with Learning Cities and civic university agendas but challenges institutions to confront the power asymmetries and extractive tendencies that have historically shaped university–community engagement.

The presentation will explore implications for teaching, research, and institutional strategy, and invite discussion on what it might mean to embed critical relationality into the heart of higher education futures.

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## **Building Authentic Inclusivity for Chinese Indigenous Epistemologies and Methodologies in Higher Education**

Zheng Ma (University of Toronto, Canada)

Dr. Zheng Ma is in her fourth year of Phd program in Social Justice Education at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education(OISE), University of Toronto. A former professor in China, she authored over 40 academic publications and directed 4 national projects. Her dissertation, based on the theorization of Chinese Muslim Indigenous intellectual and knowledge traditions, discusses and exemplifies the praxis and models of Indigenous-Western knowledge synthesis.

**Key Words:** Indigenous; epistemology; methodology; Chinese; model

**Theme:** *Co-Imagining Futures from Diverse Contexts and Traditions*

As a Chinese Muslim researcher and higher education educator who obtained transnational academic experiences in Chinese and Canadian academies, I interrogate the epistemic racism by which Chinese Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies have been neglected, negated, and simplified in Western academia: First, some research projects directed by Western theories and methodologies neglect the independent systems of Chinese Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies; Second, influenced by post-colonial narratives and dependency theory, Western academia tend to negate Chinese Indigenous academy as dependant, non-critical followers to either the state power or Western paradigm; Third, Western researchers simplified Chinese Indigenous knowledge to a single form of *Sinology*(汉学), ignoring a diverse, holistic, and synthetic system which consists of Chinese Muslim and other religious/cultural Indigenous knowledge.

To combat the epistemic racism often seen in the research and research supervision/collaboration in Euro-American higher education, I propose two models to build the authentic inclusivity of Chinese Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies through research and research supervision/collaboration. First, my ongoing dissertation project, supervised by the anti-colonial and anti-racist professor George Dei, illustrates a ‘centering model’ of research and doctoral supervision: centered as an independent knowledge maker, I have been encouraged to value my Indigenous language, education, traditions, and experiences as a generative knowledge resource to challenge the dominance of Western knowledge and knowledge production; this supervision empowers me to center Chinese Muslim Indigenous epistemology and methodology through theorization and

conceptualization, highlighting a researcher's responsibility for self, for the community, and for fulfilling the humanity. Second, based on a narrative inquiry into a Chinese Muslim researcher's collaborative experiences with a European researcher, I explore a 'dialogic model' to inform a collaborative framework grounded upon epistemic equity, dialogue, and synthesis.

As part of a dissertation project entitled 'The Knowledge Synthesis in Chinese Muslim Indigenous Intellectual Tradition-Transnational Learning from Chinese Muslim Educators in Central China,' The article provokes debate on ideological-, geographical-, and racial-based epistemic racism in research and research collaboration/supervision in higher education and explores the anti-racist praxis for a more inclusive, just, and sustainable future of education.

## Theme 5: Internationalisation amid (De)Globalisation and Challenges

17

### New partnerships in Global Higher Education: Ethical and Multipolar futures?

Miguel Antonio Lim (University of Manchester)

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**Theme:** *Internationalization amid (De)Globalization and Challenges*

Research on international institutional partnerships in higher education is focused mostly on more commonly known and assumed trends such as the transfer of policies and knowledge from 'North to South' and of international students and researchers from 'South to North'. In this panel, I will share some insights on the evolving role of South-to-South partnerships, new patterns of North-South collaboration and transnational higher education (TNHE) as part of wider national development policies, particularly in Global South contexts. By exploring international HE partnerships, the session will outline the evolution of policies to promote, govern, and achieve more 'equitable' transnational partnerships.

**Re-evaluating the value of studying abroad: The disadvantages and advantages of international degrees in China's Post-Pandemic Labor Market (Or "Contested Credentials: How Overseas Degrees Became a Paradoxical Asset in Post-2020 China")**

Wenqin Shen (Peking University)

Shen Wenqin is Associate Professor of Higher Education at Peking University. His authored and co-authored publications focused on international academic mobility (especially the mobility of college graduates, doctoral students and postdocs), doctoral career trajectories and transnational history of idea and practice of liberal education (China, UK and US). His research has been published in international journals such as the Higher Education, History of Education Quarterly, Journal of Sociology, Higher Education Quarterly, Studies in Higher Education, etc. He is currently serving as a coordinating editor for Higher education.

**Theme:** *Internationalization amid (De)Globalization and Challenges*

Study abroad has long been conceptualized as a strategic pathway for accumulating global human capital and securing labor market advantages. Yet China's higher education ascendancy and labor market restructuring have destabilized this paradigm, rendering overseas degrees insufficient to ensure competitive advantages. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 300+ Chinese students who study abroad after 2020, this study interrogates how international education has evolved into a paradoxical asset – sustaining niche advantages while engendering systemic disadvantages through three emergent mechanisms: (1) stigma attached to foreign credentials; (2) sectoral barriers excluding overseas graduates from some public positions; (3) deficient localized social networks compared to domestic peers. Findings challenge the narrative of transnational human capital advantage .

## Re-orientalising China in Internationalisation Studies

Benjamin Mulvey (University of Glasgow)

Benjamin Mulvey is a lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow. His work is interdisciplinary, and has been published in journals across the fields of education studies, sociology, and geography. These include *Higher Education*, *Sociology*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, and *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, among others. He has published extensively on international student mobility between Africa and China, and is also interested in issues of academic freedom in the Chinese context.

**Theme:** *Internationalization amid (De)Globalization and Challenges*

This paper offers a critical perspective on academic literature on the internationalisation of higher education in China. It argues that much of this work, while aiming to ‘de-centre’ the West and redress epistemic injustice, inadvertently further contributes to the marginalisation of Chinese thought by engaging in ‘re-orientalism’ and ‘Sino-speak’, relying on an essentialist and rigid East–West binary. It also mirrors aspects of official party-state discourse, potentially further undermining social-justice related goals. The paper also highlights the overlooked influence of epistemic illiberalism on knowledge production in and about China, and includes a reflection on the author’s own positionality as a Western researcher working in this field.



## **Navigating Epistemic Tensions: Chinese Returnee Academics and the Complexities of Internationalisation in Transnational Higher Education**

Bowen Zhang (Durham University)

**Theme:** *Internationalization amid (De)Globalization and Challenges*

Internationalisation in higher education is often celebrated as a global project of openness and exchange. Yet in practice, it frequently reproduces knowledge hierarchies that privilege Western academic norms while marginalising local epistemologies. This paper draws on the lived experiences of Chinese returnee academics to explore the contested enactment of internationalisation in a Sino-foreign joint venture university.

Using Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, symbolic capital, and symbolic violence, the study analyses qualitative interviews with eleven returnee academics working at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU). Participants anticipated a working environment aligned with the global academic values they had acquired abroad, including English-Medium Instruction (EMI), student-centred pedagogy, and interdisciplinary collaboration. In practice, however, they encountered structural and cultural mismatches: limited student preparedness for EMI, undervaluing of Chinese-language scholarship, and institutional norms that constrained pedagogical innovation.

Rather than passively accepting these tensions, returnees developed hybrid strategies—mediating between institutional demands and local expectations, adapting Western pedagogical approaches to Chinese contexts, and advocating for more inclusive practices. These experiences reveal how internationalisation is not a stable or neutral process, but a negotiated and uneven terrain shaped by symbolic hierarchies and geopolitical asymmetries.

This study contributes to the symposium's broader conversation on co-imagining shared futures by highlighting the need for epistemic justice in global higher education. It invites further dialogue on how universities can move beyond surface-level indicators of internationalisation and create space for pluralistic knowledge systems that reflect the diversity of their academic communities.

## **Repositioning Chinese International Students' Learning Experiences in the Age of Generative AI: A Study of Academic Anxiety, Adaptation, and Agency in UK Higher Education**

Zhixi Li (University of Glasgow)

**Keywords:** Generative AI; Chinese international students; higher education; academic anxiety; cultural learning practices; digital adaptation

**Theme:** *Internationalization amid (De)Globalization and Challenges*

This study investigates the emerging learning experiences of Chinese international students in UK higher education in response to the widespread adoption of Generative AI (Gen AI) tools such as ChatGPT. While previous research has discussed the educational potential of AI technologies, limited attention has been paid to how international students from non-Western backgrounds engage with these tools, particularly in managing academic anxiety and navigating unfamiliar educational environments.

Drawing on three focus group discussions with 15 Chinese students across multiple UK universities, this study explores the dual role of Gen AI in students' everyday academic practices. On the one hand, Gen AI tools are perceived as useful coping strategies to reduce short-term academic anxiety through clarifying assignment requirements, assisting language expression, and improving time management. On the other hand, students express concerns over information accuracy, privacy, ethical boundaries, and the potential risk of over-reliance on AI-generated content.

Importantly, this study reveals that students' prior experiences within China's distinct digital ecosystem and their subsequent adaptation to Western digital environments critically shape their perceptions and practices of using Gen AI. The research further identifies varying levels of student agency, ranging from strategic adoption to cautious or resistant use, reflecting broader tensions in globalised higher education between technological innovation and culturally shaped learning values.

This research contributes to comparative higher education debates by highlighting the complexities of student adaptation in the age of AI, and the shifting boundaries between humans. It argues that higher education institutions need to develop more culturally responsive AI literacy education and provide ethical guidance to support international students' critical engagement with AI technologies. Ultimately, this study invites a rethinking of student learning outcomes, academic agency, and cross-cultural adaptation processes within increasingly AI-mediated global education systems.

## **Common Knowledge(s): an autoethnographic reflective account of cross-cultural challenges in the supervision of Chinese Masters students**

Liyuan Zhuang & Colin Mack (University of Glasgow)

**Keywords:** cross-cultural supervision; masters supervision; international students; British higher education; academic acculturation

**Theme:** *Internationalization amid (De)Globalization and Challenges*

**Background:** Rises in international students since 1997 have led to various challenges in the supervision of international Masters students (for example, Brown, 2007; Harwood & Petric, 2016). In particular, Brown (2007) has argued that simply grafting more students from further afield onto a culturally distinct education system for income purposes is not unproblematic, highlighting issues with language difficulties, contact with supervisors, critical thinking and the assumed pastoral role of the supervisors. At the same time as increasing revenues means attracting more students within neoliberal universities, cutting costs means decreasing supervision meetings alongside workload issues for and increased demands upon teaching staff.

**Research Focus:** We look to reflect on cross-cultural supervision and how cultural norms influence engagement and communication specifically focusing on students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC). Such cultures are influenced by Confucian principles which shape educational practices differently from Western practices (see for example, Phuong-Mai N. et al., 2005; Nguyen, P. et al; Tran, T.T. 2013; Nichols, R., 2025; Luong, P. M., 2025). Cultural values such as guided learning, collective harmony, and respect for authority influence student behaviour, often resulting in a preference for passive learning and reluctance to engage in critical discourse privileged by the Western supervision model, and underlying Constructivist pedagogical paradigm where knowledge is self-constructed and independent.

We focus on international Masters level supervision with CHC students where this is under researched compared to doctoral contexts, and specifically with a non-Western cross-cultural supervisor perspective. Whilst there are existing studies looking at non-Western supervisor perspectives in clinical supervision (Jin et al., 2024; Son & Ellis, 2013) and PhD level supervision (Gjølterud & Ahmad, 2018), non-Western cross-cultural supervisor perspectives in Masters level supervision specifically is a gap. This study aims to contribute in three main ways

- **Contrasting lenses on cultural dynamics with MSc supervision:** by comparing UK and Chinese supervisors perspectives on the supervision of CHC students, our study aims to advance understanding of intercultural competence, supervisory adaptability, and the role of cultural affinity in Masters level supervision.
- **Institutional and pedagogical tensions:** We reflect on to what extent the supervisor has to manage this with little institutional support and to what extent this reflects the wider structural conflict generated by grafting on one education system to another.
- **The hegemony of Western-centric supervision models:** Building on this, we reflect on the theoretical implications: specifically, whether the Western, Constructivist epistemology undervalues CHC collective ways of knowing, and reflect on whether this supervision model, with assumed independent thinking and egalitarian supervisory relationships, are universally optimal (Son & Ellis, 2013) and to what extent other epistemologies are silenced (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988).

In two culturally distinct education systems, we explore the conflict of two pedagogical approaches to learning within the context of the cross-cultural MSc supervision encounter. This then becomes a case study in itself for the assumed unproblematic neoliberal grafting of one education system onto another in the boosting of international students Brown (2007).

**Objectives:** This study then aims to look at international Masters supervision and the specifically cross-cultural challenges within the supervision process. And to what extent these challenges sit at the level of the supervision relationships and to what extent they are generated at the institutional level but individualised with the supervision relationship. It then relates these to wider theoretical implications at the institutional and pedagogical levels.

**Methodology:** The study undertakes an autoethnographic reflective account of supervision with a cohort of Chinese (CHC) Masters social science students in 2024 in Urban Studies, using the University of Glasgow as a case study of a culturally distinct education system, with some students at a foreign educational institution for the first time. One supervisor was Scottish and the other was Chinese, enabling a comparison of approaches across four main areas: *Role of supervisors/methods of supervision*, *Expectations (of supervisors and students)* and *Feedback & Assessment* and *Professional Development*.

**Results:** The reflective accounts were then analysed for themes of commonality and difference, focusing in particular on an examination of what cross-cultural challenges arose for Chinese Masters students and the difficulties within the supervision process. These results are then discussed, drawing out to what extent these challenges are specifically cross-cultural and institutional, sitting outside the supervision relationship but somehow having to be resolved or managed within it.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** The study gives some recommendations at both levels of analysis: in thinking though how institutional and cross-cultural differences can constrain and limit the micro interactions at the supervisory level, reflecting on tensions between

internationalisation and culturally distinct education systems; as well as thinking through strategies for managing some of these within the supervision relationship itself. It also makes some wider pedagogical recommendations based on the assumed hegemony of the Western-centric, Constructivist pedagogy within MSc level supervision.

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### **Rethinking Students' Experiences in Government-Funded Exchange Programs: Insights from Brazil's Science without Borders Program (2011–2017)**

Ícaro de Oliveira Rosa (Macquarie University)

One of the most significant trends in international education in recent decades has been the expansion of government-funded exchange programs in higher education. Although there is no comprehensive or official international database of such scholarships, some authors have identified 183 programs worldwide (Campbell & Neff, 2020; Perna et al., 2014).

Traditionally, most of these programs have been implemented by countries from the Global North (e.g., Fulbright, Erasmus). However, in recent decades, countries in the Global South have developed their own programs—particularly for outbound mobility in fields related to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)—given the recognised importance of these fields for economic development, employment, and innovation (Chang et al., 2022; Li et al., 2020).

A common strategy adopted by some Global South countries when selecting universities for these programs is to establish agreements with university networks such as the Russell Group (UK), Ivy League (USA), Group of Eight (Go8), and Australian Technology Network (ATN) (Australia). These networks typically consist of well-established institutions that are consistently ranked among the world's leading universities in global ranking systems (e.g., THE, QS, ARWU). Yet, despite the increasing number of agreements between countries and these university networks (e.g., the Australia–Africa Universities Network and the Egypt–US University Partnership Program), little is known about the differences in experiences between international students participating in government-funded programs and the universities within these networks, as well as STEM students' experiences with scientific knowledge and skill development.

Drawing on an analysis of the Brazilian government-funded program Science without Borders (SwB) (2011–2017), this paper examines differences in SwB students' experiences across Australian university groups (Go8, ATN, and unaffiliated universities) and how students perceived the program's impact on their understanding of scientific knowledge and skills. Guided by a mixed-methods approach, the study focuses on the quantitative phase, which analysed responses from SwB students ( $n = 96$ ) who studied in Australia between 2012 and 2016. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Spearman's correlation tests were conducted to explore potential differences across university network groups.

The findings indicate no statistically significant differences in students' experiences across these groups. This challenges the widespread assumption that highly ranked university networks offer international students a superior overall experience or a stronger understanding and application of scientific knowledge and skills. Instead, the results invite critical reflection on the emphasis placed on rankings and standardised benchmarks, and how these may obscure more complex, contextual, or student-centred forms of value in higher education.

The findings also shed light on how governments—especially in the Global South—select university partners, often pursuing partnerships with elite institutions as a strategy for national development, particularly in STEM education. By placing students' voices at the centre of the analysis, this study questions dominant discourses that equate institutional prestige with educational quality, and supports broader efforts to reimagine higher education through more pluralistic, locally grounded, and student-informed perspectives.

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**Incorporating local knowledge: a paper level comparison of discipline and authorship patterns in 21 years of Sino-Swiss STEMM collaboration**

Xiaona Wang (University of Oxford)

Within the broader context of Sino-European relations, China and Switzerland have maintained continuous bilateral relations and historical ties since 1950. Despite these longstanding connections, the knowledge patterns of scientific collaboration between the two nations remain largely unexplored. This research addresses this gap by examining co-authorship dynamics in STEMM research between China and Switzerland from 2001 to 2021. Drawing on bibliometric data from the Chinese Science and Technology Periodical Citation Database (Weipu) and the Web of Science (WoS), the analysis employs publication counts, team size, disciplinary classifications, and three types of authorships as key indicators.

Key findings indicate that STEMM collaborations have generally expanded into larger, more dispersed teams, with significant variations across disciplines. Notably, Chinese scholars predominantly assume first and corresponding authorship roles, while Swiss scholars are more frequently positioned as last authors. Moreover, the analysis of authorship flow uncovers strong disciplinary differences over time. The regression further confirms that corresponding authorship is significantly associated with team size and temporal changes, with varied influences across different disciplines.

The research provides a comparative analysis of collaboration using integrated bibliometric data from both English and Chinese sources and offers new insights into the evolving structure of international scientific collaboration between China and Switzerland in the 21-year period, particularly regarding authorship roles and disciplines.

## **The Contributions and Challenges of ChatGPT for International Higher Education: Perspectives from the Chinese Students**

Anan Chen (presenting author), Peking University, China

Yishan Du, University College London, UK

The rapid expansion of international higher education has led to growing numbers of students pursuing degrees abroad, with non-native English speakers facing significant challenges, particularly in language proficiency and academic adaptation. While AI technologies like ChatGPT have gained widespread use in education, little empirical research has explored their role in supporting international students, especially for Chinese students. Existing studies often rely on anecdotal evidence, leaving a gap in understanding how ChatGPT aids, or hinders students in overcoming language barriers, enhancing academic performance, and integrating into foreign academic environments. This study addresses this gap by examining Chinese students' experiences with ChatGPT in UK universities, focusing on its benefits, limitations, and implications for international education.

To explore how students engage with ChatGPT in academic contexts, this study adopted a mixed-method qualitative approach, drawing on in-depth interviews with 16 Chinese students enrolled in UK universities (undergraduate to doctoral levels). Participants were selected purposively to capture diverse disciplinary backgrounds and study levels. Semi-structured interviews explored their usage patterns, perceived benefits, and challenges of ChatGPT. A Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modelling technique was used to identify underlying thematic clusters from interview transcripts, complemented by a thematic analysis to interpret student experiences more holistically.

First, the LDA analysis surfaced six distinct topics, with the most prominent one highlighting keywords such as 'problem,' 'paper,' 'translation,' 'ability,' and 'English,' pointing to ChatGPT's perceived utility in supporting academic tasks, especially among non-native English speakers. Other clusters revealed its roles in critical thinking, academic writing, communication (e.g., email writing), literature review, and technical domains such as programming. This computational analysis provided a nuanced picture of the functional areas in which ChatGPT is most actively used by students in their academic routines.

Then, the qualitative thematic analysis echoed and expanded upon these findings, with three major themes emerging: Language barrier, Academic learning assistant and Potential issues. First, ChatGPT was widely used for proofreading, paraphrasing, and generating writing ideas, reducing immediate language-related stress. Participants noted it lowered the entry barrier for academic writing but did not fundamentally improve spoken communication skills, leaving

long-term language challenges unresolved. Second, students treated ChatGPT as a virtual teaching assistant, clarifying complex concepts when institutional support was lacking. Third, overreliance risked weakening independent writing skills, with some students drafting in Chinese and directly translating into English via ChatGPT. Concerns included reduced critical thinking abilities and ethical dilemmas (e.g., plagiarism, dependency).

## Reflective Positionality and Academic Performativity in Malaysian Higher Education

Nur Izham (University of Glasgow)

This paper reflects on how the dual positionality of a Malaysian researcher affiliated with a foreign institution shapes data collection regarding academic agency in the internationalisation of Malaysian higher education. This qualitative research uses semi-structured interviews involving 30 academicians from a public research university in Malaysia, focusing on understanding academic agency. However, during data collection, the researcher felt that the paradoxical identity as both culturally similar and as an international observer influenced respondents' interaction and it generated an important aspect for reflection to understand the dynamics of power and perception in interview settings. The respondents included lecturers from different faculties ranging from science field to social science. The researcher frequently managed positionality by introducing the background details to the respondents while emphasizing the researcher's position as a PhD researcher with no relation with the main sponsor, besides stressing on anonymity and confidentiality of the interview process. This process is assisted by an ice-breaking session to reduce the anxiety about surveillance and provide space for the respondents to share their views openly with the researcher. In reflection to the situation, the researcher's affiliation prompted a performative academic representation among respondents which is persuaded by the need to align with international standards. This phenomenon is aligned from the Foucault theory on surveillance and normalisation of power and the performative identity theory (Butler, 1990). Even though respondents were not asked directly on these questions, the interview session displayed a performance of their academic selves, strategically selecting their presentation and trying to deliver a narrative that is ideally aligned with what the global definition of internationalisation requires. This portrayal is seen as a bit unnatural but is formed by a response to achieve expectations based on perceived academic norms and a reflection of their status and affiliation. In this context, the respondents are responding based on their own self-monitoring and self-surveillance, a dynamic that is based on the concept of monitoring (Foucault, 1977) perceived as academic panopticon, where the academics are constantly felt that they are observed through the system of performance, as the power becomes a controlling factor, leading to the researcher being viewed as the international- external auditor and evaluator. The research discusses how reflexivity of the researcher during the interview process manages to enrich the politics of knowledge and the control of internationalisation narrative. The context of higher education that is dominated by the global narrative and the assessments of institutions based in university rankings, it creates a gap of the internationalisation policies and the realities within the institution. Consequently, the research contributes to the understanding of academic agency, but on the importance of researcher's reflexivity in analysing the data collection process as part of the dynamics of the research itself.

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## Occupational Stress and Subjective Well-Being of Early Career University Teaching Academics in China and Scotland

Lu Li (University of Glasgow)

**Keywords:** Early career university teaching academics, Subjective well-being, Occupational stress, Cross-cultural comparisons

As global competition in higher education intensifies, early career university teaching academics (ECUTAs) are facing unprecedented professional pressures such as deteriorating health or even premature death (Peng, 2025; Luo & Wang, 2024; Yao et al., 2022), role transition (learner to educator) (Lu et al., 2019), new work environments and work-life balance, and increasingly blurred boundaries between personal and professional life (Kutsyruba et al., 2019; Ping, 2017; Zhao, 2019), as well as high social expectations, mismatches between salaries and expectations, job insecurity in different academic systems (Cong & Xu, 2018; Ping, 2017). The impact of these pressures on their subjective well-being (SWB) has become increasingly prominent. However, most of the existing studies have focused on a single cultural context and lacked comparative exploration of the relationship between stress perceptions, coping strategies, and SWB among ECUTAs in different cultural contexts.

Therefore, this study takes ECUTAs in China and Scotland as a comparison. There are significant differences between the higher education systems (China's centralized governance and massification and Scotland's devolved and autonomous system) (Liu & Zhang, 2019; Shattock & Horvath, 2020), academic evaluations (China's "publish-or-perish" tenure reforms and REF-driven hierarchy in Scotland) (Bijak & Degl'Innocenti, 2016; Li & Shen, 2020) and historical and cultural values (self-government, individuality, and independence in Scotland and harmony, generations and interdependence in China) (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) of these two countries, which provide an ideal field for cross-cultural comparisons.

Based on Job Demands-Resources model, coping theory, cultural self-construction theory, this research aims to: 1. Explore and understand the occupational stressors ECUTAs in China and Scotland face and the impact of these stressors on different dimensions of their SWB. 2. Investigate the type of coping strategies ECUTAs in China and Scotland adopted when they are facing occupational stressors and the effect of their cultural contexts on their cognition and adoption of coping strategies. 3. Assess the effectiveness of their coping strategies in addressing their stressors and different dimensions of SWB and provide relevant improvement strategies for both individuals and organizations.

To achieve above research aims, qualitative research methods will be used in this study, including a pre-questionnaire and post-in-depth interviews. The findings of the research may contribute to theoretical advancement in cross-cultural research on academic well-being and offer practical recommendations for universities to develop culturally sensitive support systems, improve ECUTAs' SWB, and enhance the professional development of ECUTAs.

## **Challenging Deficit Narratives: Insights from International Chinese Master's Students in Scotland**

Huiyang Lyu (University of Glasgow)

This study explores the lived experiences of Chinese international master's students from non-English-speaking backgrounds at the University of Glasgow, examining how they navigate academic, linguistic, and cultural barriers within UK higher education. Drawing on a mixed-methods case study, the research integrates survey data (n = 30) and semi-structured interviews (n = 5), with qualitative data analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework.

Findings reveal that students face significant challenges with academic writing in English, adapting to independent learning styles, managing group work dynamics in culturally homogeneous cohorts, and accessing timely administrative support. Despite these barriers, participants demonstrate strong resilience and agency by forming peer support networks, actively seeking institutional resources, and developing adaptive strategies to meet the expectations of UK academics. For instance, over 60% of survey respondents described the academic workload as "quite challenging," and 90% reported engaging with educational support services. Yet, qualitative data also indicate that institutional offerings often lack cultural sensitivity and discipline-specific relevance, particularly in language support and mental health services.

Framed by Marginson's (2014) self-formation theory and critical perspectives on deficit narratives in international education, this study challenges reductive portrayals of Chinese students as passive or lacking. Instead, it highlights their self-directed efforts toward academic and personal growth, even in the face of structural constraints. These insights point to a pressing need for more integrated, culturally responsive, and student-centred support models in UK universities.

By re-centring international students as agentic learners rather than recipients of remediation, this research contributes to reframing institutional practices through a strength-based lens.

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