

A CONCEPTUAL PAPER: THE IMPACT OF BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE ON INTERNATIONALIZING CHINA'S HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract – China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an ambitious plan to improve infrastructure and boost the economy by establishing a network of trade and transportation corridors between Asia, Europe, and Africa. Some have argued that the BRI is a new form of Chinese imperialism, while others see it as a potential driver of global economic growth. This has generated considerable interest and controversy. In addition, the effect of the BRI in internationalising China's higher education system has received comparatively little attention. This article focuses on introducing BRI and addressing the impact of BRI on China's higher education sector internationalisation. The interactions of educational institutions with the BRI, such as campus life internationalisation and new research partnerships opportunities were discussed. The findings of this article will be useful to a wide variety of organisations on a domestic and even a global scale. As a result of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), there may be chances for institutions located in other countries to collaborate with universities in China and take part in research projects that are conducted jointly. This leads to the gaining of access to new markets, resources, and knowledge is something that might be beneficial to international organisations. There is a possibility that the BRI will be of assistance to both domestic and international organisations in their efforts to learn more about Chinese culture and society. This, in turn, may ultimately lead to increased levels of mutual understanding and collaboration.

Keywords – Belt and Road Initiative, Internationalizing higher education.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last 40 years, China's higher education system has become increasingly globalised. In the late 1970s, as part of the country's overall effort to modernise, China began implementing a policy of opening up its higher education system to students from other countries (Quainoo et al., 2020). Studying abroad, adding an international perspective to classroom instruction, and offering transnational programmes in collaboration with foreign institutional partners are the three main ways in which Chinese universities are becoming more globally engaged. Since China's economic reform and opening up in 1978, the country has devoted four decades to building institutions of higher education on a par with those found everywhere in the developed world (Long, 2020). China's national competitiveness and international influence can benefit from its universities becoming

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more internationally oriented, and this is being widely recognised.

The educational system at Belt and Road Initiative also includes extensive instruction at an advanced level in several occupations (Li, 2021). Although the Belt and Road Initiative Higher Vocational Education Plan was not a direct sequel to the Belt and Road Initiative Education Plan, it had already taken into account the Belt and Road Initiative in its design to update higher vocational training prior to the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative Education Plan. This was done in order to ensure that higher vocational education kept pace with the times. Because of this, the Higher Vocational Education Plan has the potential to be regarded as the origin of vocation education.

As a result, one interpretation of the Belt and Road Initiative Education Plan is as a policy instrument promoting vocational education. The objective of China to increase its economic and political influence in other countries is referred to as "going out" five times in this strategy paper. It is stated in this strategy that vocational institutions should assist China in accomplishing this objective by providing training to technical professionals, both Chinese and international, who would be needed to finish Belt and Road Initiative projects for Chinese enterprises (Mukhtar et al., 2022). The standard of higher education offered in a country is very important to the country's overall economic and social development. Over the past several years, the internationalisation of higher education has emerged as one of the most significant national trends and political goals in a variety of developing nations. The process of incorporating an international and multicultural component into the teaching, research, and service roles of educational institutions is referred to as "internationalisation of education". The nature of higher education is shifting toward being more global.

The players from other countries through representation of avatars (Yeh & Wan, 2016). Thus, it provides a space for English language learners to increase confidence and comfort and to overcome cultural barriers for learning English (Zheng, Young, Brewer, & Wagner, 2009). In fact, as reported by Lan (2015), many literatures support the use of online virtual world in English education because of its potential of providing EFL learners with the needed language contexts without any temporal barrier as well as the potential of enhancing EFL learners' language competences.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

China has shifted from being the world's greatest exporter of foreign students to being a net importer of international students. Thanks to the government's efforts, China is becoming a popular choice for students from other countries (Ye, 2022). China's inbound international student policies can be explained by at least four streams of ideology/theory: neo-liberalism, the developmental-state thesis, the soft power approach, and the cultural approach. Internationalizing higher education is a major strategy for countries to educate young talents and produce world-class scientific outcomes. The Belt and Road Initiative is an element of this soft power strategy since it will "enable the connectedness of policy, infrastructure, trade, money, and people" through international education, student mobility, and especially more international students in China (Oleksiyenko et al., 2021). With cheaper regional options opening up to cater the academic freedom which is being sought after by the Chinese students, and as such given the evolving states of the nature of this expansion, there is still problems being experienced in fully operationalizing the academic freedom as per the expectations of the Chinese students.

Although American universities gladly accept Chinese (and other overseas) students, the voluntary-segregation phenomenon and the integration challenge they provide are significant obstacles to their full participation in campus life (Jenner, 2020). It is not appropriate for a university to limit its execution of an international strategy solely to educational research. Instead, the administration of higher education institutions should take into consideration the overlap that exists between businesses and universities in order to secure collaboration for the sake of long-term development. The implementation of the "Belt and Road Initiative results in later difficulties in maintaining positive intercultural linkages, despite the fact that it presents a potential to expand higher education sectors along the path leading to a global scale (Gong et al., 2020). The success of the BRI depends on its ability to overcome a number of internationalization challenges. One of the biggest challenges facing the BRI is the lack of a unified international legal framework. The initiative is not a formal treaty, and there is no single set of rules governing its implementation.

This means that countries involved in the initiative must negotiate their own bilateral or multilateral agreements, which can be difficult and time-consuming. It also means that countries may have different interpretations of the initiative, leading to potential conflicts and disputes. Another challenge is the lack of transparency and accountability. The BRI involves a large number of countries, and there is a risk that some of them may not be fully committed to the initiative. This could lead to a lack of trust between countries and could undermine the initiative's effectiveness. Additionally, there is a risk that some countries may use the initiative to pursue their own interests, rather than the interests of the wider region. A third challenge is the lack of coordination between different countries. The BRI involves a large

number of countries, and there is a risk that some of them may not be properly coordinated.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many factors, such as trade volume, infrastructural development, GDP per capita, geographical accessibility, and the overall quality of higher education institutions, have been investigated as potential explanations for the influx of international students (Susilawati et al., 2021). There has been little study, however, of how transnational programmes or initiatives may affect students' decisions about where to pursue higher education. It would be important and illuminating to conduct a comprehensive analysis of how the growth in the number of countries participating in the Belt & Road (Belt and Road Initiative international partnership has affected the influx of international students. Important economic, social, and cultural elements like the Corruption Perception Index, the urbanisation rate, and natural resources are overlooked by experts because much previous study has focused on developed countries like the United States, Europe, etc.

Countries along the Belt and Road Initiative route share many similarities with China, particularly in terms of their economic and cultural history (Li et al., 2019). Therefore, investigating the macro and micro elements that can affect the flow of international students among the Belt and Road Initiative countries will strengthen empirical evidence and theoretical foundations. The present study needs more research examining the theoretical boundary of worldwide competitiveness in the field of higher education via the lens of market growth of universities or colleges in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. Therefore, we first compare the pre- and post-Belt and Road Initiative numbers of foreign students to assess the impact that the initiative has had on the growth of the higher education sector along the route (Gong et al., 2020). Next, we examine the "push" and "pull" impacts, from both macro and micro perspectives, on the quantity of Belt and Road Initiative students enrolling in Chinese universities.

The Belt and Road Initiative will have an impact on China's expansion into global markets for universities in partner countries, as evidenced by an analysis of the available data. Furthermore, in the context of Belt and Road Initiative "push" factors are related to China's macro and microenvironments, such as high export, low import, low tariff rate, and the quality of China's higher education, while "pull" factors are significantly related to countries along the Belt and Road Initiative route, and include economic, cultural, and social factors of the Belt and Road Initiative countries. When seen from the perspectives of resource transfer and commerce, the dynamic path of new markets aids in the integration of the global economy.

To succeed in today's global economy, businesses must be competitive, productive, and profitable (Jonbekova, 2020). Students from developing countries are more likely to be affected by current events in their home countries, whereas students from developed countries are more likely to be influenced by China's growth potential and relatively high education level compared to their origin countries. When deciding where

to study abroad, international students from poor countries value education and economics equally for countries in the same development stage, but only value economics when considering locations in the rich world. The Chinese government offers financial assistance in the form of scholarships.

The area is now connected through the medium of education as a direct result of the emphasis that was placed on the building of links by the OBOR initiative. During the course of his talk, Xi disclosed a 10-year plan that calls for the provision of 30,000 scholarships to members of the SCO so that they may pursue higher education at Chinese colleges. In addition to this, the plan calls for the Confucius Institute to extend an invitation to its 10,000 teachers and students to participate in the training programmes that will be held there. Due to the fact that Central Asian Republics make up four of the eight members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, such a substantial offer has given rise to suspicions that China is aiming to impose its influence over Central Asia through the medium of higher education. Since the early 1990s, when the nations that make up Central Asia gained their independence for the first time, China has been giving students from those countries with financial aid so that they can pursue their education in China. Students who are interested in pursuing their education in China have a number of options available to them, including full or partial financial assistance from for-profit organisations, institutional scholarships, grants for Confucius Institutes, and scholarships offered by the Chinese government at varying levels.

The Chinese government's stance on a variety of important domestic problems can typically be inferred from the scholarships it offers. The influence that their presence has had on the process of internationalising higher education in Xinjiang, which is the province in China that is located the furthest to the north, is a less obvious result of their presence than the impact that these consistent encounters have had on the procedure. Some students from Central Asia have stated that they feel more at ease studying in Xinjiang than they do in their own Central Asian region, and this sentiment has been voiced by these students. Xinjiang is becoming a more desirable location as a result of its well-developed infrastructure, low costs of living and tuition, and general enhancements in the quality of the programmes that are now being provided there. The support of policy has also led to an increase in the number of students from Central Asian nations enrolling in higher education programmes in the United States (Jonbekova, 2020). In China, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Silk Road Economic Belt (Silk Road Economic Belt), and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (21CMSR) are all components of an effort that is both broad and continuous to reorganise the educational system in the country. Universities in China, along with other educational institutions throughout the world, are currently faced with challenges that need to be overcome if they are to continue to provide high-quality education, in addition to contributing to cultural exchange and economic growth. One such challenge is a shortage of funding, which is a major obstacle to all three of these goals (Kumar et al., 2021).

The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on Internationalizing China's Higher Education is a significant topic that examines the influence of the BRI on the process of internationalization in Chinese higher education institutions. The independent variables (IVs) of learning interest, learning opportunity, and learning competency through BRI play a crucial role in shaping the internationalization efforts, while the dependent variable (DV) is the internationalization of China's higher education system. Learning competency through BRI is the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired by students and academic institutions as a result of their engagement in BRI-related activities. The study may examine how learning competency through BRI influences the internationalization efforts of Chinese higher education institutions. The dependent variable is the internationalization of China's higher education system, which is influenced by the IVs mentioned above. The DV of internationalizing China's higher education system represents the desired outcomes of the research.



Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

IV. METHOD

For the study of internationalizing China's higher education via One Belt One Road, a qualitative research approach is proposed. The qualitative approach will focus on understanding the reasons international students further their studies in China. Qualitative research will be conducted to learn how individuals in real life situations discuss and debate a wide range of social and non-social issues. Qualitative research aims to accomplish its goal of understanding not just "what" people think, but also "why" they think it by asking in-depth questions of study participants about their cognitive processes. In this research open ended questions will be used and interviews will be taken from participants when researcher require in-depth, specific details, an interview is an excellent way to acquire qualitative data. Open-ended inquiries that allow researcher to glean extensive context are best suited to casual, conversational conversations. The interview will be video recorded. The interview questions include three aspects: Learning interest, Learning opportunities and Intercultural Competency. With open-ended questionnaires, respondents are encouraged to provide detailed comments. Thematic data

analysis will be conducted by understanding, explaining, and interpreting patterns and themes in textual data.

Qualitative data is made up of things other than numbers, like words, pictures, notes, and symbols. When we did study on the effects of the Belt and Road Initiative's goal of making China's higher education more foreign, we thought about how reliable and valid the methods and tools were.

Reliability is the degree to which study results stay the same over time and in different situations. We used well-known research methods and tools that have been tried and proven in other studies to make sure this research was accurate. It included using standardised poll tools to collect data, using the same data collection methods at each study site, and making sure that data analysis is done in a uniform and thorough way.

Validity is a term for how accurate and trustworthy the results of a study are. To make sure this research topic was accurate, we checked to see if their research methods and tools were measuring what they said they were measuring. To figure out how true their research results were, we also looked at their external validity. This is the extent to which research results can be applied to situations outside of the study site. To make sure external validity, we used a group of people that was representative of the whole community we were looking at.

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