

Shaping International Campuses in China: The Interplay of Policy, Economy, and Culture in Higher Education Leadership

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Abstract

Internationalization has emerged as a key component of higher education, offering significant advantages to students, staff, and institutions all around the world. However, universities are under more pressure to prepare students for the global market. The success of an institution's internationalization programs is significantly influenced by university executives, particularly those navigating the complexities of a unique cultural and organizational landscape. This paper delves into the role of government policy, economic conditions and organizational culture in this context, aiming to provide insights into leadership styles that facilitate the internationalization of higher education. This paper contributes to a more comprehensive framework that can inform strategic decision-making and enhance the effectiveness of internationalization efforts in the unique educational landscape of Guizhou.

Keywords: China, Higher Education, Internationalization, Government Policy, Economic Environment, Organizational Culture, Leadership.

Introduction

The internationalisation of higher education in China has also been influenced by the country's developing approach to foreign aid and its participation in projects such as the "One Belt and One Road" policy (Liu et al., 2019). At the same time, China's higher education system has made a big move in reshaping its international campuses, and witnessed a successful in the internationalisation of its higher education institutions due to the country's rapid expansion of educational aid and training (Yuan et al., 2022). This growth is consistent with China's overarching plan to participate in the global division of labour and use soft power to influence the course of events worldwide. While in the context of internationalization, readiness of higher education in China has been affected by numerous issues, including the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on student mobility (Yu, 2022). Because of this, internationalisation policies have had to be reevaluated, and safety issues have to be addressed in order to keep the momentum of global engagement in higher education working.

China's larger economic, political, and educational policies are closely entwined with the growth and configuration of its international campuses. As China continues to grow its

worldwide impact and participation in international projects, the internationalisation of its higher education system and the construction of international campuses play a vital role in establishing the country's future position in the global knowledge economy.

Effective leadership is crucial for the success of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Bass, 1985), particularly in the complex organizations with unique cultures that they are. As globalization continues to impact national governments and higher education institutions worldwide, internationalization of higher education (IHE) has become essential for survival in the growing knowledge-based economy. IHE is driven by various factors, such as economic competitiveness, student mobility, faculty exchange, research collaborations, international reputation, and diplomatic relations (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach et al., 2009; de Wit & Altbach, 2021; de Wit & Knight, 1996).

China has made significant investments in internationalization policies for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in order to establish itself as a global leader in education (Zhang et al., 2013). In a broad perspective, government policies can influence university international leadership in a number of ways, such as by providing funding for internationalization initiatives, promoting international collaboration, and removing barriers to international student mobility (Altbach, 2004; Knight, 2008; De Wit & Knight, 2012; Jia & Chen, 2021).

The economic environment can also play a role, as universities with strong financial resources are typically better able to invest in internationalization efforts (Van der Wende, 2011; Teichler, 2013; Marginson, 2016; Jia & Chen, 2021). Similarly, Organizational culture can also shape university international leadership, as universities with a strong culture of internationalization are more likely to prioritize internationalization in their mission and goals (Gagliardi, 2000; Deem & Lei, 2010; Schein, 2010 and Li, 2020). Universities that are able to successfully navigate these factors are more likely to be successful in internationalizing their operations.

Although research on IHE has grown rapidly in the past two decades, there is still a lack of research on institutional plans and the perspective of internationalizing of their institutions (Larsen and Haque, 2016; De Wit, 2017). Similarly in China, there are several key research areas within IHE, such as study mobility, university partnerships, curriculum and pedagogy, global talent development, and cultural diplomacy. However, there is still a research gap in examining the leadership styles of senior international officers and their role in the internationalization process. Furthermore, IHE in China still mainly focus on world-class research universities instead of local universities in less developed areas.

Influence of Government Policy on IHE

Government policies pertaining to campus internationalisation encompass various domains. These policies establish frameworks, regulations and financial support systems that have an impact on the university leadership styles on internationalisation efforts. For instance, policies that can help create a campus that is more internationally engaged include those that support the recruitment of international students, ease staff and faculty movement, and encourage joint research with foreign universities. On the other hand, measures that limit the movement of international students or obstruct the hiring of foreign faculty and staff may impede the progress of campus internationalisation of the school (Knight, 2019).

Policies that make it easier for international students to study in a country have been found to attract more international students. According to Marginson (2006); Knight (2008); Welch & Welch (2014), supportive policies include those that grant visas, offer tax breaks or financial support for international faculty and staff to travel abroad, grant sabbaticals and leave programmes for research or teaching abroad, and streamline the immigration process for foreign faculty and staff. The educational institutions in the nation may be able to draw in and keep talented foreigners with the aid of these strategies. The Chinese government has put in place a number of programmes to entice foreign students, encourage intellectual exchanges, and improve the worldwide standing of its institutions (Ji, 2017; Altbach et al., 2018; Knight & Wang, 2015). One notable policy is the "Study in China" initiative, initiated in 2010. Its primary objective is to increase the number of international students studying in China. In order to draw brilliant students from all around the world, the project offers scholarships, grants, and other financial incentives. Additionally, it supports the building of foreign campuses in China and the growth of English-taught programmes (Ji, 2017).

To facilitate academic exchanges and collaboration, the Chinese government has launched programmes like the "Double First-Class Initiative" and the "One Thousand Talents Plan". These initiatives seek to increase research capacity, foster innovation, and draw top-tier international academics and researchers to Chinese institutions (Altbach et al., 2018). Furthermore, via programmes like the "Belt and Road Initiative" and the establishment of Confucius Institutes worldwide, the Chinese government encourages cooperation between Chinese and foreign institutions. These efforts support mutual understanding and cooperation by enhancing educational and cultural linkages between China and other nations aim to strengthen educational and cultural ties between China and other countries (Knight & Wang, 2015).

Influence of Economic Environment on IHE

The economic environment, according to Investopedia (2023), encompasses external factors influencing the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services in an economy. When considering the impact of the economic environment on campus internationalization, it refers to the conditions and factors affecting the internationalization efforts of educational institutions.

A strong and open economy fosters an atmosphere favorable for the internationalization of higher education, while a poor economy may present challenges in attracting foreign faculty, students, and forging global collaborations (Knight, 2019). Guizhou, a region in China, serves as a case study illustrating how economic conditions affect the internationalization of higher education, facing challenges like low GDP per capita, high poverty rates, and a lack of foreign investment (Luo et al., 2021).

These economic concerns hinder Guizhou's institutions from attracting foreign faculty and students and forming global alliances, causing the province to lag behind in internationalization compared to other Chinese provinces. To overcome these challenges, universities in similar environments should develop focused tactics recognizing their economic realities and constraints.

The Guizhou government's commitment to expanding global participation in institutions is evident through increased government assistance, financing for foreign student recruitment, exchange programs, and the development of international alliances. The growing number of international students choosing to study in Guizhou reflects the improving economic environment, with a substantial increase from just over 5,000 in 2015 to over 10,000 in 2019. Guizhou Normal University (GZN), a prominent public university in Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou province, exemplifies the positive outcomes of internationalization efforts. Offering courses in English, forming alliances abroad, and actively recruiting foreign students have contributed to GZN's success, with over 1,000 international students currently enrolled, a significant rise from just over 500 in 2015.

Despite these developments, institutions in Guizhou, including GZN, face challenges in their pursuit of globalization:

(1) **Insufficient Funds:** Limited financial resources pose challenges for universities in supporting internationalization efforts, hindering recruitment, partnerships, and necessary infrastructure investment.

(2) **Language Barrier:** The language barrier may impede international students' full participation in Guizhou's academic curriculum, social relationships, and everyday life, particularly if they are not fluent in Chinese.

(3) **Cultural Disparities:** Differences between Chinese culture and the cultures of overseas students can present challenges. Adjusting to a new cultural setting, customs, and social conventions may be a learning curve, requiring universities to provide support and materials for adaptation.

These difficulties highlight the need for strategic solutions to ensure the success of internationalization efforts in Guizhou and similar environments.

Influence of Organizational Culture on IHE

In the academic setting, the culture of higher education institutions refers to the values and beliefs held by university stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, students, board members, and support staff (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Bartell, 2003). These values and beliefs, rooted in tradition, are communicated through verbal and nonverbal means (Bartell, 2003). They have a sizable impact on how decisions are made and mould both organisational and individual behaviours (Tierney, 1988; Bartell, 2003). Stories, specialised language, and institutional standards are used to convey behaviours that reflect underlying assumptions and ideas (Bartell, 2003; Cameron & Freeman, 1991).

A university's culture may be compared to its personality, and it can be determined by looking at things like building architecture, campus facility maintenance, and student interactions and attire (Bartell, 2003). University administrators are becoming more aware of the role that culture plays in driving change and advancement at their institutions. Additionally, according to Bartell (2003), universities have specific qualities that align strongly with their respective reflect the cultures. Universities frequently have vague and difficult-to-measure aims, in contrast to most business organizations (Bartell, 2003; Baldrige et al., 1978; Birnbaum, 1988;

Kosko, 1993). Additionally, universities have diverse internal and external stakeholders who play significant roles. Internal stakeholders encompass domestic and international undergraduate, graduate, professional, and continuing education students. External stakeholders include community members, political entities, granting and accrediting agencies, labor unions, and the press (Bartell, 2003).

In this context, the university can be thought of as an intricate web, where the role of managers is to link components of the web together (Bartell, 2003). As a web, the university may be compared as a network that is continuous and intertwined, enabling communication amongst people who share authority and responsibility (Bartell, 2003). The attitudes and behaviours of trustees, senior administrators, faculty members, students, campus community, competitors and society as a whole combine to substantially form the culture of that institution (ASHE, 2003). An academic social system must have a strong and thorough awareness of tradition and history to function well; if this is achieved, university hierarchy can consist of a common mental model that enables all faculty and staff to give meaning to both internal and external events. Faculty, staff, and students are often informed about this mental model either orally or through the written bylaws and handbooks (ASHE, 2003).

Organisational culture has a variety of effects on the internationalisation of higher education. Here are a few ways corporate culture may influence globalisation attempts in general (Knight, 2004; Keeling, 2006; Altbach & Knight, 2007).

(1) Support for Internationalization Initiatives

Organisational cultures that are forward-thinking, open, and collaborative are more likely to support and facilitate efforts that go worldwide. Institutions with these cultures are usually more receptive to global programming, collaborative research projects, and international collaborations. De Wit (2017) showed, for instance, that institutions with an open culture and a strong commitment to internationalisation were more successful at luring international students and promoting international collaboration.

(2) Cultural Diversity Adaptability

International students looking for a welcoming and open educational environment sometimes find more attraction in institutions with a strong culture of inclusion, diversity, and global viewpoint. De Vita et al (2018) highlighted the positive effects a strong inclusion and diversity culture has on the experiences and integration of international students.

(3) Decision-Making and Risk-Taking

Cultures that respect autonomy, taking risks, and decentralised decision-making might help internationalisation efforts. When there is a culture that encourages experimentation and learning from failures, institutions may be more proactive and agile in their responses to internationalisation challenges. For instance, a study by Knight (2014) found that institutions with cultures that support risk-taking and decentralised decision-making were better at coming up with creative internationalisation strategies.

(4) Leadership and Vision

Organizational cultures that may inspire and guide internationalization initiatives have strong leadership, a clear vision for internationalization, and effective communication channels.

People are inspired to embrace global engagement by leaders who stress internationalization and actively explain its relevance. A study by Marginson (2016) illustrates the importance of vision and leadership in establishing an organizational culture that supports internationalization in higher education institutions. It is significant to remember that different institutions and situations may experience different effects of organizational culture on internationalization. The distinctive cultural dynamics and institutional traits will determine the precise effects. For instance, from the Chinese viewpoint, organizational culture might have particular effects on how higher education is internationalized.

Discussion

The examination of government policies in China reveals a complicated approach aimed at increasing the internationalization in higher education institutions (HEIs). Initiatives such as the "Study in China" program and the "Double First-Class Initiative" demonstrate the government's commitment to attracting international students, nurturing research collaborations, and enhancing the global standing of Chinese institutions. Programs like the "One Thousand Talents Plan" aim to increase research capabilities and bring high-quality international academics to China. Despite these positive implementations, challenges persist, as clarified by the paper. Issues such as insufficient funds, language barriers, and cultural differences are significant obstacles. Strategic solutions are needed to ensure long-term success in internationalization efforts in China.

The economic environment in Guizhou emerges as a critical factor influencing the internationalization of higher education. The paper's exploration of economic conditions in the region reveals both opportunities and challenges. While the commitment of the Guizhou government to expanding global participation is evident through increased assistance and financing, economic constraints such as low GDP per capita and high poverty rates present difficult obstacles.

Organizational culture plays an essential factor in influencing the internationalization of higher education institutions. Institutions fostering forward-thinking, open, and collaborative cultures are more likely to successfully engage in global programming and collaborative research projects. Through fostering cross-cultural understanding, encouraging academic collaboration, and preparing students for a globalized workforce, internationalization plays a crucial role in improving higher education. A culture valuing inclusion and diversity positively affects the experiences and integration of international students. It entails incorporating an international component into the curriculum, research, and administrative duties, among other areas of the university. Higher education institutions need to embrace internationalization in order to be relevant and competitive in a time when ideas and information are moving across national boundaries at a never-before-seen pace. Besides, cultures that encourage risk-taking and decentralized decision-making contribute to creative strategies for internationalization. The discussion emphasizes that leadership and vision play a pivotal role in establishing an organizational culture that supports internationalization in higher education institutions. The paper acknowledges that the impact of organizational culture may vary across institutions and situations, depending on cultural dynamics and institutional traits.

Leading higher education institutions through the complexity of international politics requires seasoned and capable leadership. In this condition, leaders need to be able to handle the complex web of international relationships, comprehend the subtleties of many cultures, and match institutional methods with global objectives. In addition to speeding the internationalization of campuses, effective leadership in international affairs makes sure that organizations are flexible and responsive to the demands of a constantly changing global educational environment.

In a nutshell, the internationalization of higher education is largely shaped by government initiatives. Leaders can strategically match the objectives of their institutions with broader aims by comprehending the impact of national directives and efforts.

Conclusion

Internationalization plays a critical role in the enhancement of higher education. The interplay of policy, economy, and culture in higher education leadership in China is a complicated and dynamic process that significantly influences the development and direction of the country's higher education system. As higher education experiences changes in an increasingly interconnected global context, it is important for institutions to understand and implement effective leadership styles in international affairs to ensure their success in the global educational landscape. Experienced and effective leadership is essential for the success of internationalization in higher education institutions, and the absence of such leadership can result in various challenges.

Leadership in higher education is not only about individual characteristics and strategies but is deeply tangled with the broader policy framework, economic imperatives, and cultural dynamics within China. The leadership characteristics in higher education are crucial in navigating the era of disruption and transformational change. This goes in line with the present academic background of higher education in China that experiencing significant reforms as part of the nation's restructuring. The restructuring of Chinese higher education is crucial in building a pool of talent that can effectively contribute to the nation's economic reform agenda.

In conclusion, the interplay of policy, economy, and culture in higher education leadership in China is a complex and interconnected phenomenon. Effective leadership in higher education necessitates a deep understanding of the policy landscape, economic imperatives, and cultural dynamics to drive meaningful change and development within the higher education sector.

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