

# **Educating China on the Move: A Typology of Contemporary Chinese Higher Education Mobilities**

## **Abstract**

The landscape of global higher education is changing rapidly in response to and alongside the geopolitical and geosocial global transformations and China and East Asia are becoming key players in higher education. As China's economic power and strategic reach grows against a context of global uncertainty, it has become increasingly important to develop a nuanced understanding of Chinese globalisation, not least for its significance to the balance of power relations within and beyond Asia. Higher education provides a powerful lens through which to see how China is globalising and how this might impact on the world. This is manifested in its many established and newer forms of education mobilities. Recognising the lack of research efforts to systematically understand the complexities of contemporary higher education mobilities across China, this paper proposes a typology through a thematic narrative review of more than 250 peer-reviewed journal articles, government and media documents. This typology of Chinese educational mobilities reveals three key insights, including 1) a critique on the 'mobility imperative' and the role of the Chinese state, 2) a call for more longitudinal and/or retrospective research to facilitate a relational understanding of the fluid nature of higher education mobilities in China, and 3) a note on the urgency of developing a comprehensive theoretical and conceptual tool kit. This article contributes to an updated understanding of the fluid, multiple and multi-directional nature of contemporary higher education mobilities of China.

**Keywords:** China, higher education mobilities, globalisation, typology

## **Introduction**

The landscape of global higher education is changing fast in response to and alongside the geopolitical and geosocial global transformations. Over past decades ‘western’ higher education institutions have dominated and the directions of international education have tended to be from ‘the west’ to East Asian countries (Djerasmovic, 2014). However, the dominance of ‘the west’ as provider and controller of international education is increasingly being challenged by China and East Asia. This is particularly visible through the changing mobility patterns of students and academics between the ‘west’ and ‘east’ and also within large emergent economies such as China where the scale of higher education mobilities has seen unprecedented growth. In 2016, China sent 544,500 students to pursue higher education (HE) abroad and attracted 440,000 international students to its own higher education institutions (HEIs) (ScienceNet, 2017). In addition, more than 18,000 scholars from China ventured abroad to conduct research while nearly 15,000 non-Chinese academic staff joined Chinese HEIs from overseas in 2013 (Liu, 2016; Wu, 2018). In addition to this, the number of Confucius Institutes reached 500 in April 2017 while the number of international branch campuses of Chinese HEIs is predicted to reach more than 20 by 2018 (Brown, 2016). These are in addition to more than 1,000 Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run schools (CFCRS), as of 2016, that China has welcomed to its soil.

Patterns of educational mobility are changing and are intricately linked to globalisation, increasing neoliberalism and geosocial transformations (Brooks and Waters, 2011). Educational mobilities are part of the intensifying global flows of people and knowledge that have developed alongside globalisation and new trends in mobilities can show how previously dominant hegemony is shifting. At the same time, internal education mobilities within large economies such as China have been on the increase and this is a complex phenomenon bound up with geopolitical, cultural and socio-economic factors. Among the students moving from one part of China to another to pursue higher education, a significant proportion of these students are displaced from rural to urban contexts, from economically less developed and ethnic minorities-dominated Western regions to the economic centres and Han-dominated areas in the East (Li, 2013; Li & Heath, 2017). In addition to the sheer scale of education mobilities emanating from China, more complex and diversified patterns are emerging, including both older and newer forms, of education mobilities which not only impact on China itself, but have significant implications for the rest of world, particularly in the sphere of higher education. Such implications may include

transforming the landscape of higher education in China, and challenging the Western-domination within the field of global higher education (Marginson, 2008).

With regard to impacts on the rest of the world, China's rapid ascendancy in the global economic development league table lays a solid foundation to China's growing role in contributing to global knowledge, principally via its higher education sector. In 2011, China overtook the United States in having the world's second largest number of researchers (19.1%, after the European Union). In 2014, China's share of scientific publications accounted for slightly more than one fifth (20.2%) of the world's total publications, up from 9.9% in 2008 (UNESCO, 2015, p. 18). Looking into the future, an analysis of trends in the Scopus database of scholarly research in 2018 indicates that China could overtake the US on the measures of both research quality and overall citation impact by the mid-2020s (THES, 2018). Furthermore, the vast geographic spread, gigantic population and economic power of China mean that newer forms of education mobilities are emerging, triggered by China's increasing influence on globalisation and the shifting scenes in the world's economic and political atmosphere .

However, to understand what is going on in China, it is important to understand it not only through its exchanges and collaborations with other countries and regions, but also what is happening within China. The significance of understanding Chinese education mobilities for China lies in internal economic and social inequalities; as Marginson (2017) notes, these may prevent China from reaching its grand ambitions of reasserting its 'rightful status relative to the West' (Yi & Jung, 2015, p 779) or of becoming a new 'centre of educational pilgrimage' (Anthony, 2017, para 4). Instead of viewing China as an homogenous entity with a uniform set of desires, ambitions and actions, this paper brings to the fore China's rich, vast and complex internal education mobilities, as 'a critical lens through which to examine large social changes' (Xiang & Shen, 2009, p. 514). We argue that these are important to facilitate a thorough

understanding of the strategies and challenges that China is facing in its contemporary higher education arena and have significant implications for the rest of the world.

In view of the complexity of the phenomenon of educational mobility discussed above, a classification system or typology would enable a more systematic understanding of the role of education mobilities in global higher education. Thus, this paper has the following aims: 1) systematically categorising both the established and newer forms of HE mobilities of China and, 2) highlighting key issues and debates that are likely to attract or indeed deserve future research attention in the field. As with any attempt to categorise, the typology that will be presented is one of many possible ways to group and categorise higher education mobilities in contemporary China and this typology is a starting point in understanding higher education mobilities in China but could provide a basis for further modelling of educational mobilities globally. Indeed, as the paper progresses avenues for future research are outlined.

### **Education Mobilities: A definition**

Education mobility in this paper refers to the educationally motivated spatial movements of students, scholars, programmes and institutions, generally in higher education, from their home country or region to another. In charting the various forms of educational movements in contemporary China, we adopt the plural form of ‘education mobilities’ to indicate the varied nature of mobilities that are motivated by and / or resultant of educational activities. This is inheriting the legacy of the ‘mobility turn’ which recognises that in our contemporary world ‘issues of “mobility” are centre-stage’ (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006, p. 1). We foreground mobility as an empirical phenomenon worthy of investigation, rather than considering it as a by-product of larger social processes that can be readily explained through existing theoretical or disciplinary means.

As global mobility, particularly in the arena of education, accelerates so the research terms and conceptualisations around it proliferate, resulting in a complex field surrounding educational mobilities. There are other terms that could have been chosen here, such as ‘migration’ which has associations with forced migration and refugees (a growing global challenge) or, in terms of student mobility, the term ‘study abroad’ has a large associated literature. Here, however, we chose to explore the concept of education mobilities in order to present a typology which could illuminate both internal (to a country such as China) and external (international) mobilities. This use of the concept of education mobilities enables an exploration of the relationships between physical and social mobilities, thus providing a lens onto social and educational inequalities. This also makes possible a critique of the valorisation of mobility itself, where much of the literature and discourse of educational mobility implicitly associates value to mobility, thus marginalising those who are immobile, either by choice or because their mobility trajectories are impeded by socio-economic factors.

Whilst the aim in this paper is to present a typology of educational mobilities which will facilitate an overall understanding, we also acknowledge the dynamic, multiple and multi-directional nature of mobility, noting that education mobilities can be complex, circular or part of a ‘mobility chain’ effect where one sort of mobility can lead to another. Overall, this use of the concept of education mobilities signifies a theoretical shift in the way that we view mobility in higher education towards an acknowledgement of the intensifying inequalities intrinsic to mobility in the current moment.

## **Methodology**

This paper is a systematic review of literature although not aligned to those in scientific disciplines such as medical research. Instead, this paper could be categorised as a thematic narrative review (Lunsford, Grindle, Salatin, & Dicianno, 2016). It began with an extensive

electronic search around key words such as mobilities; education mobilities; higher education; China, and this built a library of approximately 250 items. During the analysis, preference was given to authors from Chinese or East Asian contexts in order to ensure a non-Western bias and also to capitalise on research literature generated from within China.

Non-academic sources such as ScienceNet and China Daily were also included in the search and a separate section of the library collected together government and policy documents relating to higher education mobility within and around China, e.g. One Belt One Road initiative and other relevant documents. University websites such as that of Tongji University were also included in the analysis. Criteria for the selection and foregrounding of certain literature amongst the plethora of research that exists in this field was led by the conceptual and theoretical concerns of the authors around the relationships between physical mobility and social mobility; educational inequality; geopolitical considerations of China's place in the world, and aspects of political economy relating to HE globalisation. Here the authors' educational and research backgrounds came into play, with the first author having already carried out research in mobilities in China and the second author having research interests in partnerships in higher education in China. The combination of the insider perspective provided by the first author's background as a resident of Hong Kong and the second author's experience in 'western' higher education was also crucial in the construction of this research. Thus, in addition to the literature search, this paper and its analysis draws on the intersection between the two authors' research specialisms, their expertise and experience in partnership work in China and draws together Chinese and UK academic perspectives. However, this could also be seen as a limitation of the study, as the existing theoretical concerns of the authors led to both the inclusion and exclusion of particular research studies and this will have influenced the construction of the typology itself. Following the literature review, the typology was developed in a number of iterative stages, with a first version being constructed by the first author and then discussed by the two authors. This typology was then presented to experts in the field in two different

international conferences where feedback was collated and informed further refinement of the typology.

### **The typology**

As shown in the typology in Table 1 below, we argue that contemporary higher education mobilities in China can be categorised along two different axes. Firstly, along the dimensions perspective: there are the Home (geographic and social) and Abroad (outbound and inbound) mobilities. Secondly, from the agents' perspective, there are student, academic and institutional mobilities<sup>1</sup>. These two axes then allow the construction of nine different types of mobilities. Reviewing this typology highlights significant gaps in the literature to date in certain areas, which will be detailed in the discussion. In what follows, there is a review of the key literature in each of the nine types of mobilities and research gaps will be highlighted along the way.

**(Insert Table 1)**

### ***Higher education mobilities at home***

Higher education mobilities at home are largely characterised by agent flows (mostly students) from the socio-economic and ethnic hinterlands of the Western regions of China to the eastern and coastal areas, from rural sites to urban centres, from ethnic minority regions to Han-dominated areas, and bi-directional flows (students, academics and institutions) between mainland China and special political entities including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

#### ***1. Student Mobilities***

##### ***a) Internal mobilities in mainland China***

There is an exponential number of rural students migrating to urban centres to pursue higher education within China. For most rural students from lower SES areas of China, the 'overwhelming message delivered through formal schooling still points towards higher

education in metropolitan areas as the next logical step for clever enough students' (Forsey, 2017, p. 62). However, rural students moving to elite universities in China 'against all the odds' have faced multiple disadvantages, including lack of legitimate forms of cultural capital and economic resources, resulting in alienation and self-exclusion (Li, 2013). What has been the most striking is the imposed construction of rurality as inferior and backward in the metropolitan urban university campus, which leads to a sense of estrangement and shame among the rural students (ibid.).

Education mobilities from the West to the East and from rural to urban areas are often conflated with movements of ethnic minority students to Han-dominated educational institutions. For instance, in Guo and Gu's (2016) research on Uyghur students and Yi and Wang's study (2012) about Tibetan students in Han-dominated, urban universities in eastern China, these students commonly face a lack of symbolic cultural resources such as access to acquiring powerful languages; their ethnic identity and the diversity they represent are often reduced by institutional practices to homogeneity, thus these students encounter tremendous difficulty in fostering a sense of 'biographic continuity'. Questions have been raised by researchers as to whether higher education policies in China with regard to ethnic minority students' higher education can adequately prepare human capital for the respective minority groups, or whether it is merely about producing the conforming citizens that the Party-state desires (Yi & Wang, 2012, p. 78).

***b) Bi-directional student flows between mainland China and Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan***

There has also been an emerging trend of bi-directional flows between mainland China and other greater China regions, including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan (Gao, 2014; Gu & Tong, 2012; Lan & Wu, 2016; Author 1, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). While the scope of such



bi-directional flows is less substantial when compared with other internal student mobilities, this type of mobilities occupy a strategic position due to the political and ideological distinctions of these regions. For the outflows of students from mainland China, the Chinese government stipulates the number and provinces in which students can be recruited by these HEIs; similarly, the governments in these respective territories regulate the proportion of mainland students that can be admitted. For the inflow of students from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, the Chinese government decides on principles for admission and other favourable conditions to be proffered to these students. There is arguably a notable political agenda underpinning such cross-border student flows. For instance, Lan and Wu (2016, p. 2) consider the Chinese government's efforts to recruit Taiwanese students as an attempt to 'bolster its claim of sovereignty over Taiwan' while a former Chief Executive Officer of Hong Kong articulated that mainland Chinese students are envisaged to 'inject[...] an element of healthy competition for local [i.e Hong Kong] students and broaden[...] [local] students' outlook on the Mainland and the region as a whole' (Tung, 1998, para 103). As a result, the experiences and subjectivity formation of these border-crossing students tend to be closely shaped by the shifting political relations between mainland China and these entities.

To date, there has been more research on the experiences of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau (Li, 2007; Li & Bray, 2006, 2007; Author 1, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Yu & Zhang, 2016), but not much in the other direction. It has been found that top universities in Hong Kong have been attracting academically high-achieving students from well-off middle-class backgrounds who continue to reproduce privileges through various forms of capital conversion, exchange and re-evaluation (Li & Bray, 2006, 2007; Author 1, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a). On the other hand, working class students of lower academic calibres from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan capitalise on the preferential university admission policies to access prestigious top university resources on the mainland (Lan & Wu, 2016). It is found that

social inequalities along the axes of class, rural and urban divide continue to be reproduced through such cross-border student mobilities (Lan & Wu, 2016; Li & Bray, 2006, 2007).

## ***2. Academic Mobilities***

Domestic academic mobilities in China can arguably comprise a) mutual flows of academics between mainland China and Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, and b) social and geographic mobilities of academics from less privileged backgrounds, e.g. rural, ethnic minority and low SES backgrounds migrating to urban, middle-class and ethnic-majority centres. To date, little research, if any at all, has focused on such academic mobilities within China. Chen (2016) has conducted a small case-study on foreign academics' experiences of recruitment and job satisfaction at one Hong Kong university. In this study Chen distinguishes Chinese mainland from foreign academics. However, given the small sample size that comprises only two Chinese mainland academics, not much in-depth qualitative insight can be gained. Despite this, Chen's study has revealed the significant proportion of Chinese mainland academics in Hong Kong HEIs. For instance, Chinese mainland academics outnumber other non-Chinese foreign academics by two to eight times among six out of the eight faculties in the case study university. Similarly, given the internationalisation agenda and recruitment strategies of mainland Chinese universities, an increasing number of academics from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan have joined MLC HEIs. There is, therefore, intriguing research potential in this area.

Regarding academics from less affluent backgrounds, there is emergent research that focuses on the life and career trajectories of Chinese academics of rural backgrounds (Author 1, Forthcoming-a). However, with regard to an intersection of academics from ethnic minority, low SES and rural backgrounds, there is still little (if any) research. We argue that this area of research could be an interesting avenue, given the importance of equity for under-represented faculty members in higher education in other parts of the world (E. M. Lee, 2017).

### ***3. Institutional Mobilities***

Domestic institutional mobilities can comprise a) cross-border collaborative programmes / branch campuses between HEIs of mainland China and Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, and b) mainland Chinese higher education institutions setting up branch campuses in other parts of China, e.g. Beijing Normal University's branch campus in Zhuhai.

As of June 2016, there are 5 joint-venture institutions and 43 joint programmes between Hong Kong / Taiwan and mainland Chinese HEIs, e.g. the United International College co-founded by Hong Kong Baptist University and Beijing Normal University (Ministry of Education (Jiaoyubu), 2018). As this is modest in number and in history (e.g. the earliest joint-venture institution was set up in 2005), not much research has been conducted to date. Nevertheless, emergent research has shown the exclusive nature of such joint-venture institutions and their heavy bias against economically non-viable students who lack parental social, cultural and economic power for continued involvement during and after higher education (Qin, 2017). While social equity is an important issue within such domestic cross-border collaborations, attention to pedagogic practices in light of the differing political and ideological priorities of HEIs from mainland China and Hong Kong/Macau/Taiwan, could be interesting to explore in future research.

In parallel to internal cross-border collaborations, some HEIs in mainland China, especially the more prestigious ones, have established branches in various localities of China. For instance, both Peking and Tsinghua universities in Beijing have set up branches in Shenzhen city in southern China. Research into the institutional strategic positioning, impacts of such internal branch campuses on the HE provisions of hosting cities / provinces, as well as social equity could well warrant future scholarly attention.

## *Outbound education mobilities*

Outward higher education mobilities from China have been on the rise.

### *1. Chinese students migrating abroad*

Perhaps of the most interest to those in the West has been the increasing student flows between China and the world. As of 2016, the number of Chinese students going abroad totalled 544,500, a 36.26 per cent increase from 2012 (ScienceNet, 2017). The student outflows from China since the opening-up policy in the late 1970s can be said to be closely related to the nation's political and economic reasoning, i.e. the catch-up mentality with an aim of bringing back expertise and knowledge that the country was lacking (Jokila, 2015, citing Hayhoe 1984). However, in contemporary China, going out of China to pursue higher education or for research experience and cultural exchange for scholars have become important means to cultivate highly convertible cultural capital and academic capital (Leung, 2013; Xiang & Shen, 2009).

Departing from psychological and enculturation research focuses in older literature, recent research in this area has underlined the nuances of Chinese overseas students' motivations and expectations, and the subsequent impacts that overseas sojourning has exerted on their identity formation. This burgeoning literature has covered diverse aspects including how the sojourn experience has transformed political and professional lives (Hail, 2015; Lai, 2015; Thøgersen, 2012, 2015) and how it relates to integration and segregation issues (Chen & Ross, 2015; Coates, 2013; Fong, 2011; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015a; Hansen, 2015; Kajanus, 2015; Yang, 2014b).

Importantly, this literature demonstrates a critical awareness of how social inequalities on all levels can be embedded in the transnational movement of Chinese students. Specifically, at an international level, studies have pointed to the global hierarchy that differentiates countries politically, culturally, economically and socially (Fong, 2011), and which motivates the desire to transform oneself from a developing world citizen to a 'developed world citizen'. This global

hierarchy is most entrenched in the global higher education system (Waters, 2004, 2006), which differentiates students based on their country of origin (Chen & Ross, 2015; Yang, 2014a, 2014b) as well as categorises HEIs into dominant and subordinated ones (Hansen, 2015; Marginson, 2008). At a national level, observations are made regarding the social stratifications that engender differing strategies adopted by MLC students of different socio-economic backgrounds (Fong, 2011; Kajanus, 2015) and of different academic calibres (Fong, 2011; Hansen, 2015). Indeed, as Gu and Schweisfurth (2015b, p. 360) highlight, less than 2 per cent of tertiary students from China have been able to partake in overseas studies. The current international mobilities of MLC students have reinforced and perpetuated social stratification in China because the most prized cultural capital in the form of reputable degrees from the ‘global circuits’ of tertiary institutions (Brooks & Waters, 2009, p. 1088) can no longer be ‘purchased monetarily without the accumulation of genuine human and cultural capital’ (Xiang & Shen, 2009, p. 521). This excludes most students who are deprived of substantial financial capital, and those who cannot afford the extended period of time required for such acquisition of human and cultural capital.

## ***2. Outbound academic mobility***

Another group of the most mobile actors are academics from China who pursue research abroad. There are, however, few statistics or little research that documents the scale and nature of this form of educational mobility, with some exceptions. In her study of 123 Chinese academic staff in Germany, Leung (2013) reveals that transnational geographic mobility for Chinese academics can be considered as a form of cultural capital in its own right and can often be converted into other forms of capital (e.g. social, economic capital). However, she rightly questions the legitimacy and validity of equating transnational academic mobility as necessarily beneficial. Leung points out that the higher education terrain in China is highly

uneven, with some institutions that can be considered the best in the world and others still ‘catching up’. As such, she argues astutely that ‘the gradient of difference in “academic excellence” travelled by mobile academics is often steeper if they move within the country than a visit to another institution with comparable resources and “quality” overseas’ (p. 322). As a result, she advocates de-linking the individual from the nation, and debunking the oft-unquestioned dichotomous assumption that individuals from the ‘South’ should travel to HEIs in the ‘North’ to learn and to up-skill.

While Leung’s study focused mainly on academics based in Chinese HEIs travelling abroad for a finite period of time and often bound to return to China, another small body of literature investigates those who migrate abroad first as students and then remain abroad as academics. This group of academics is most often captured in literature pertaining to ‘brain drain’ for developing countries like China and ‘brain gain’ for developed economies (Zweig, Fung, & Han, 2008; Zweig & Wang, 2013). To mitigate such a plight of losing high-level talents to the West, China has developed a ‘diaspora option’ (Zweig et al., 2008, p. 1) in which mainlander Chinese scholars can remain overseas and still contribute to China’s development through collaborative research activities and the like. While the academic mobility of China is an under-researched area, the issues that it reveals relate closely to the debate about the ‘mobility imperative’ and how mobility can be usefully conceptualised in the Chinese contexts. This will be further analysed in the discussion section of this paper.

### ***3. Confucius Institutes and Branch Campuses***

In addition to outflows of Chinese nationals at an individual level, the past decade has seen the upsurge of a nascent phenomenon, that is, the exportation of Chinese higher education abroad. Aligned with the import-export model of Chinese higher education identified by Huang (2007), Mu notes in the *UNESCO Science Report 2010* (UNESCO, 2010, p. 396):

International cooperation in China has gradually evolved from personal exchanges, communications among academics and the importation of technology to joint research projects, the joint establishment of research institutions and Chinese participation in, or initiation of, megaprojects.

In this paper we pay dedicated attention to two forms of such ‘outgoing’ higher education provision: Confucius Institutes and international branch campuses. These projects manifest what Yang (2010, p. 243) depicts as a ‘new form of China’s higher education internationalisation, featured by a much-improved balance between introducing the world into China and bringing China to the world within an altered global landscape of higher education.’ These projects are arguably reflective of China’s aim to project its soft power<sup>ii</sup> and expand its global influence through higher education (Paradise, 2012, pp. 197-198).

Confucius Institutes (CIs) have been a contested terrain in terms of their roles and impacts (Schmidt, 2016). As of 2017, there are a total of 500 CIs established across Asia, Africa, America, Europe and Oceania (Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), 2017). These CIs are meant to consolidate China’s rich cultural heritage and are primarily missioned to teach Chinese language and culture. Concerns have been raised by some about CIs’ imposition of a Chinese propaganda and attempts to jeopardise academic integrity of hosting HEIs outside China (Peterson, 2017; Redden, 2018; Starr, 2009). Yang (2010), however, contends that little evidence is available to sustain such accusations, citing instances where diverse viewpoints about China are presented and disputed personnel are invited to give lectures at various CIs in different parts of the world. It therefore remains contested as to whether CIs are in effect impinging on the intellectual freedom of the HEIs where they are based. However, such public scrutiny of the CIs in the West, especially Euro-American organisations, seems to suggest an

uncomfortable worry, with academics remaining vigilant and watchful in the face of China's soft power boosting strategies.

In support of China's growing economic power and to further expand its global presence, China's state-directed efforts of 'bringing China to the world' has most recently been manifested in the international branch campuses that are established by Chinese HEIs (Author 2, 2016a). Most recently, China's prestigious Peking University acquired its campus at Oxford and is set to open its first class in 2018, having bought the site vacated by the Open University in Oxford, demonstrating a shrinking reach for UK universities and a developing reach for China (Author 2, 2017). This move is described as a 'bold step' to boost Peking University's international reputation (Philips, 2017). This initiative parallels Peking's rival Tsinghua University's Global Innovation Exchange programme in Seattle, which is a joint graduate institute with the University of Washington (Brown, 2016). In 2012, the prestigious Tongji University, located in Shanghai, launched its 'Sino-Italian' campus in Florence, Italy (Tongji University, 2012), this is paralleled by similar joint-ventures by other Chinese HEIs in Asia-Pacific regions, including for instance, Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine's Kobe school in Japan (Zhou, 2015), Soochow University's Laos campus (Brown, 2016), Beijing Language and Culture University's Tokyo campus (Zhou, 2015), Yunnan University of Finance and Economics' Thailand campus and Xiamen University's Malaysian campus (Hu & Zhao, 2016).

Such overseas ventures of Chinese HEIs are heralded as China's soft power push. As Brown (2016) rightly argues, educating a younger generation that includes potential foreign leaders can be beneficial to China in the long run. This is evidenced by the China-friendly Ethiopian current president who received all his higher education at Peking University and the current prime minister of Kazakhstan who pursued higher education at Wuhan University and Beijing Language Institute. In a similar vein, it is envisaged that attracting foreign students to Chinese



HEIs' branch campuses can help cultivate China-friendly dispositions among potential future world leaders.

However, it raises the question of whether the same kind of concerns and criticisms over Confucius Institutes would be similarly levelled at Chinese HEIs' branch campuses abroad. Brown (2016) cites Kevin Kinser, a professor at Penn State University, as cautioning that China's attempt to promote its soft power could backfire if issues of academic freedom and integrity are not tackled properly. More importantly, while most recognise that overseas branch campuses could be effective in building China's soft power, there are caveats that cannot be overlooked. First and foremost, there are implications on resources and financial support required of the government. Given that such branch campuses are not necessarily operated on a self-sufficient model, they usually require considerable financial support from the home universities and the Chinese government (Zhao & Chen, 2017). This, therefore, triggers debates about whether such overseas ventures are serving only the interests of government officials and universities while diverting limited educational resources from the less well-endowed universities in mainland China (Brown, 2016).

### **Inbound education mobilities**

The *third*, and most recent dimension has positioned China as the destination of education mobilities. Over the past decade or so, China has been attracting increasing numbers of international students (Ma, 2016), academics (Kim, 2015), collaborative educational programmes and international branch campuses (Author 2 et al, 2014; Author 2 et al 2015; Author 2, 2016b; Moufahim & Lim, 2015).

#### ***1. Inbound international student mobility***

The number of foreign students in China has increased beyond 440,000 in 2016, a recorded 35 per cent rise from 2012. Among these students, 210,000 pursue degree-level studies, accounting for 47.4 per cent of all foreign students in Chinese HEIs. Of the 205 countries and regions in the world from which these foreign students are drawn, the top ten countries of origin are South Korean, the USA, Thailand, Pakistan, India, Russia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Japan and Vietnam (ScienceNet, 2017). As of 2016, China has become Asia's No. 1 destination country for international education (Sun, 2017).

Overall, little research has been done to explore the experiences of international students in China. Among the handful of studies that have been published so far, most focus on exploring the decision-making processes for international students to choose China and findings of such studies are quite convergent. They mostly cite an interest in China's economic development and prospects of utilising the Chinese language proficiency and familiarity with Chinese culture for future economic gains and career development (Ding, 2016; Onsmann, 2013b), and experiencing a new way of life and seeking to construct a Chinese cultural identity for students of Chinese ancestry (Ma, 2016). There are also some studies that explore the pedagogic challenges experienced by international students, including problematic quality concern of English as a medium of instruction and limited student-faculty interaction (He & Chiang, 2016; Wen, Hu, & Hao, 2017). Intriguingly, Lin and Kingminghae's (2017) study of intimate relationships of 305 degree-seeking female Thai students at Chinese universities reveal insights into how these female Thai students strategically move internationally to create environments that benefit their career and life development.

Overall though, little systematic research has been done to explore, at a more conceptual and theoretical level, international students' experiences in China. A forthcoming edited collection which presents a more rounded perspective is a notable exception to this (Dervin, Du, & Harkonen, 2018); in addition, Li (2015) conceptualises a 'mediated space' for five

international students in China. According to Li, this ‘mediated space’ is distinct from the ‘third space’ conceived of by Bhabha (1996); instead, in this ‘mediated space’ the international students in China brought their multiple intersecting experiences and perspectives to act as a cultural mediator themselves. However, while the concept was intriguing, Li’s study was conducted in 2006-2007, at a time when international students’ presence in China was still quite modest (Ding, 2016) and China’s international education was ‘still in its infancy’ (Li, 2015, p. 252). More recently, in Yang’s (2018) ethnographic study of less affluent Indian students who pursue medical education at a non-prestigious university in China, he unravels the multiple compromises and complicities that exist among these students, their families and the host Chinese university. Yang argues that compromise and complicity in this case can be interpreted as ‘ingenious solutions devised by social actors who try to materialize their educational desires, social aspirations and organizational objectives amidst realities of class disadvantage and resource inadequacy’ (p. 12). This emergent literature therefore signals exciting promises for more contemporary, in-depth conceptual and theoretical work.

In addition, as the number of international students keeps growing, another urgent issue thus arises; that is, how China can retain talented international students graduating from its HEIs, against a background where foreign graduates commonly report a lack of opportunities to pursue careers in China (Zhang, 2016). What institutional and executive level work can be done in China? It seems little research has been done in this regard either.

More importantly, how has the changing landscape of international student enrolment in China impacted on other parts of the world? Notably, Ding (2016, p. 320) suggests that ‘in contrast to the period from 1950 to 1978, when holders of the Chinese Government Scholarship constituted the majority of the international student population, holders of this scholarship currently account for only 9.8% of the population’. This corroborates Anthony’s (2017) observation that the number of self-financed students from Africa enrolling in Chinese HEIs

has been steadily increasing, testifying to the soft power boost of China. Anthony also argues that for international students from less well-developed countries, such as Africa, China is increasingly replacing the Euro-America HEIs as a new ‘centre of education pilgrimage’ (ibid., para 4). The metropolitan ambience of some Chinese super cities can provide ‘a parallel cosmopolitanism normally thought of as the preserve of Euro-American higher education’ (ibid., para 7). Chinese HEIs thus possess the potential to, and perhaps are quietly becoming an alternative destination and option for students from the developing world. Anthony further testifies to this thesis that in Africa employers are increasingly recognising the symbolic capital of higher education qualifications obtained from Chinese HEIs: ‘It’s now not simply about taking a degree in China, but about which university you studied at and the attendant pecking order that goes with that’ (ibid., para 11). The legitimacy of such a ‘pecking order’ further manifests the symbolic power and degree of recognition a Chinese HE qualification is accorded in the labour market in Africa. This argument bears important implications for other HE systems in the world, including the dominant Euro-America systems.

However, a closer examination of the statistics of international students in China seems to suggest that the international student intake in China is more a manifestation of regional mobility than global mobility. As Wen et al (2017, p. 3) note, more than half international students in China come from Asian countries (57.9 per cent). They also highlight the sharp downturn in enrolment of students from developed Western countries (except the US) and declining number of students from Japan. They point out that since 1999 student numbers from European countries such as France, Germany and the UK have remained limited while Japanese students’ market share in China has plummeted from 28.6% in 1999 to merely 4.8% in 2013. In parallel to this, the number of students from other bordering Asian countries and from Africa has been on a notable rise:

There has been an exponential growth of international students coming from shared-border countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, India, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Mongolia...In addition, the number of African students is increasing quickly from 1384 in 1999 to 33,359 in 2013, constituting 9.3% of the total market. (Wen et al., 2017, p. 3)

This phenomenon resonates with Anthony's (2017) observation that the international student flow to China is predominantly 'one-way', while China's own students are keener to pursue higher education in the traditional HE destinations in the West.. Despite China's increasing capacity to attract foreign students, the hegemony of Euro-America HEIs, as dominated by Ivy league institutions in the US and Oxbridge and Russell Group super-league universities (Marginson, 2008) is still alive and well and heavily subscribed to by the majority of Chinese students and families. This phenomenon therefore presents an intriguing parallel: on the one hand, China seems to have become an emerging alternative HE destination for bordering Asian countries and for African countries, on the other hand, the global dominance of Euro-American HEIs persists. This thus arguably positions Chinese HEIs in the middle of a global HE hierarchy. Even more intriguingly, therefore, is whether China's HEIs' ascendancy within this global HE hierarchy enables China to challenge the status quo of global inequity in HE, or whether China is merely reinforcing and reproducing it. We argue that more research needs to be done in this area.

What is noteworthy is that not all foreign students in China are enrolled in Chinese HEIs, but a sub-group of them are attracted to China because of joint venture universities, which will be discussed later in this section, such as the University of Nottingham Ningbo China. Indeed, while joint venture universities in China provide an opportunity for local students to acquire a foreign degree without leaving China, increasingly they attract foreign students to come and study in China. For instance, in Onsman's study (2013a), he surveyed 117 international

students at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China and discovered that the top three reasons for these students to choose to study in China was firstly because they could get a British degree at a lower cost (Onsman, 2013b), and secondly the China experience and thirdly the quality of courses offered at UNNC. Lee (2017) has studied 32 North American and European students enrolled in such international branch campuses in China and found that these students cling onto their whiteness in constructing and legitimating the image of their authentic cosmopolitan experience. On the whole, more investigation into these students should warrant research attention.

## ***2. Inbound Academic Mobility***

### ***a) Academic/student returnees from China***

In 2016, the number of students that returned to China was 432,500, a 58.48 per cent increase by 159,600 in comparison with 2012. Overall, more than 80 per cent of students going abroad decided to return to China, narrowing the outflow-returnee deficit (ScienceNet, 2017). These returning students have been labelled ‘sea turtles’ or ‘haigu’, highlighting their increased tendency to return home after their education (Kennedy, 2018). This has arguably confirmed the ‘reverse brain drain’ thesis and testifies to China’s success in attracting its high-level talents back (Zweig & Wang, 2013). Among these returnees, a sizeable proportion are academics. Ai and Wang (2017) use autoethnographic methods to narrate the experiences of Ai’s self-transformation, journey and experiences of returning from Australia to work in several Chinese universities. Their study fills the gap in more in-depth, individualised research on academic returnees in China. Ai suggests that his ‘transnational capital’ is not readily recognised in the field of university English language education and argues more broadly that in China academic returnees in the humanities encounter more frustrations because ‘the liberal arts and humanities have been seen more as spiritual pollution than useful knowledge’ (Louie,

2006, p. 14), as compared with the more ‘useful’ technology subjects areas. Ai and Wang’s literature review also helps to contextualise the broader field of academic returnees by discussing the interactions between Chinese mothers and their returnee children and explicating the tensions and uncertainties experienced by such Chinese (Chang, 2010). Most intriguingly, in Moufahim and Lim’s (2015) study of 20 Chinese students enrolled in transnational education branch campuses in China, these students expressed discriminatory views about Chinese academic returnees who became their lecturers. They were cited as being critical of their racial backgrounds and became particularly concerned about their English oral skills and (lack of) ‘Western traits’ (p. 447). Despite these interesting studies, there is a general lack of in-depth and large-scale studies of the adaptation, living experiences and academic impacts of Chinese academic returnees to date.

#### ***b) Academic staff from abroad***

According to the Educational Statistics Year Book of China (2005-2013), the number of foreign faculty members jumped from 6,228 in 2005 to 14,945 in 2013, 5,812 of whom possessed PhD degrees (Wu, 2018). Overall, there has been a notable increase of non-Chinese international lecturers being hired in Chinese universities since 2000, with a recorded steady 10% increase year on year (Kim, 2015, p. 608). This is aligned with the aim of internationalising Chinese universities’ global outlooks and meeting the demands of domestic students for learning about non-Chinese perspectives. These non-Chinese full-time international faculty members are mainly recruited through two different channels. The first is through prestigious state-sponsored schemes such as the Thousand Talents program and Chang Jiang Scholars program which target high-end international experts, who are usually recruited by research-intensive universities supported by Projects such as 985 and 211 (Chu,

2013). The second channel is via ordinary university recruitment processes which are open to foreign candidates. This group usually receive much lower salaries and limited compensation packages, unlike their peers recruited through the first channel.

In Kim's (2015) study she interviewed 41 non-Chinese faculty members recruited via ordinary university recruitment processes to explore how they made sense of their career decisions in relation to teaching in Chinese universities. Intriguingly, most of these professors regarded teaching and living in China as the last resort and perceived their move to China as a social downgrade, suggesting that Chinese universities are not yet a highly desirable destination for foreign academics. For the 15 foreign academics in Li and Lowe's (2016) study, quite a few placed their inter-racial marriages with Chinese partners as key motivations and the majority of non-language teaching academics were concerned about not accumulating competitive academic capital for career progression in their attempts to return to Western academia. In Huang's (2017) large scale study of 855 non-Chinese academics at 11 selected universities in China, he finds interesting demographic features of these academics, e.g. a vast majority are male, and more than half are originally from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. As for their motivations, different from Kim's finding, Huang's preliminary results point to competitive compensation packages and favourable work and research conditions. Despite these few fascinating studies, more research should be done, perhaps exploring more nuanced differences between academics recruited via the two different channels, the degree of competition between foreign academics and Chinese academic returnees. Such research will not only enable the Chinese government and HEIs to devise their talent import strategies, but will be of relevance to other emerging economies engaging in the global 'talent war' (Zweig & Wang, 2013).

### ***3. Transnational Education in China***



At the institutional (and programme) level, the past two decades have seen a rapid expansion of franchise, articulation, education hubs and branch campuses of foreign HEIs in China (Hayhoe & Pan, 2015; Hou et al., 2014; Moufahim & Lim, 2015). In June 2016, there were a total of 73 joint venture institutions and 1,003 joint programmes across China, totalling 1076 approved Chinese-foreign higher education projects. Such projects are generally referred to as Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run schools (CFCRS). The term CFCRS covers joint-venture institutions, and projects to run programmes on a joint basis (joint programmes). Wu and Li (2015, p. 28) distinguish such CFCRSs into two types, those with an independent legal status (i.e. an independent legal entity) and those without. They note that by April 2014, there were eight such CFCRSs with an independent legal entity status, such as University of Nottingham Ningbo and Shanghai New York University. In 2013, the Chinese Ministry of Education recorded 450,000 students enrolled in joint-venture campuses and programmes at 577 higher education institutions across mainland China, accounting for 1.4% of the overall size of Chinese students in higher education at the time (Qin & Te, 2016).

There is an emergent body of literature that explores the motivations and strategies of such transnational higher education (TNHE) importation to China at governmental and institutional levels (Hou et al., 2014; Qin & Te, 2016). Generally, there seems to be a deep concern about the quality of 'foreign education resources', which Lin and Liu (2009) argued to be 'unsatisfactory' (p. 71). Lin and Liu contend that while most world-renowned foreign universities were hesitant about entering the TNHE market in China, those institutions most eager to forge partnerships with Chinese HEIs are almost exclusively driven by economic benefits (Hou et al., 2014). Even in the rare cases where world-class foreign universities are on board, they tended to offer programmes that were not their most competitive ones. In general, Lin and Liu express great concern about the lack of regulation/accreditation at the time in China and the undesirable 'quality' of such CFCRSs. Since then, new measures began

to be adopted, including the ‘supervision platform’ “containing a list of approved CF CRS institutions and programmes, relevant policies and regulations, and guidance for students; and the ‘recognition platform’, requiring students to give notification that they are registered on their programme in order to ensure recognition of their degree” (QAA, 2013, para. 19), to enable the MOE to monitor and assess the programme integrity and ‘quality’.

However, what has been lacking in this literature is the view of the target ‘consumer’ of such CF CRSs, i.e. the students, who usually have to pay higher tuition fees for such programmes. Can they accumulate the social and cultural capital, supposedly transferred by the institutional capital of the foreign HEIs? What are their graduation prospects? How do they stand in comparison with peers enrolled in domestic HEIs or peers enrolled directly to HEIs abroad? Little research has been done in this regard, with the exception of Tsang (2013, p. 665) who suggests that the middle class families in China ‘nurture their children to study at transnational universities, and then use the qualifications as a stepping stone for studying abroad even if they fail to well secure a place in one of the tier-one universities’. In this process, the parents’ work unit (danwei) and their household registration status (hukou) become instrumental for these middle-class families to reproduce their cultural and economic privileges. This finding is echoed by Qin (2017) whose case study at one such joint-venture branch campus reveals powerful and persistent parental influence over the students’ study and post-graduation stages. More importantly, Zhang and Xu (2000) have cautioned that internationalisation of HE in China, most noticeably through the importation of curricula from foreign countries, may result in more dominance of Western cultural imperialism, eliminate cultural differences and erode indigenous Chinese values and practices. How are they played out within the negotiation of curriculum design? These are important issues to explore.

A related issue to curriculum and programme offering, is that due to the profit-driven nature of such joint-venture campuses, it is possible that providers cherry-pick profitable

programmes such as IT, business and commerce programmes (e.g. MBA) to offer, while evading responsibilities to offer a full range of programmes that domestic public universities have to shoulder (Naidoo, 2007, p. 9). In the case of China, tightening control and regulatory works conducted by the MOE, especially after 2006 (QAA, 2013, paras. 18-19), as well as regional and local governments' strategic prioritisation (Hayhoe & Pan, 2015) may ameliorate such a tendency. Still, more research needs to be done in this area so as to ascertain the degree to which this tendency is likely to jeopardise the local education system.

## **Discussion**

Reviewing the literature captured within this typology has pointed to three notable issues that we will critically engage with: 1) the 'mobility imperative' and the role of the Chinese state, 2) the lack of longitudinal studies on full trajectories of education mobilities and 3) theoretical and conceptual challenges.

### **1. Critique on mobility imperative and the role of the state**

We want to highlight the potential harm of the 'mobility imperative' within Chinese contexts. This should be understood primarily in relation to the Chinese state's role in engineering, legitimating or regulating certain forms of higher education mobilities.

#### ***a) The 'mobility turn' and 'mobility imperative'***

In this typology paper, we inherit the legacy of the 'mobility turn' (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 1) by accentuating its central theoretical position in understanding contemporary higher education in China. However, we also note that the 'mobility turn' also 'elicit[s] strong political critiques from those who feel marginalised and harmed by these new developments' (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 1). For instance, in relation to education mobilities, Forsey (2017, p. 58) articulates his critique of the 'mobility imperative', in which 'education helps frame a modernity in which

individual progress and achievement are increasingly linked to the sheer physical act of movement.’ Resting upon a promise of social mobility, the mobility imperative valorises education movements away from home and building a career. Such an imperative thus bequeaths symbolic power over education mobilities while marginalising and excluding those who are educationally immobile. Importantly, under such a framing, education mobilities are closely linked to class:

while mobility is certainly not the sole preserve of the middle classes, there is something in the training and material advantages of the middle classes that allow them to use mobilities strategically. It seems to be the case that built into the socialisation of middle class persons is an implicit belief in the necessity of travel, be it to a school beyond the local catchment, or on a student exchange programme, or to another town to attend a different school or to go to university. (Forsey, 2017, p. 67)

Indeed, education mobilities are intricately related to and implicated by various forms of social inequalities. As Tesfahuney (1998, p. 501 cited in Hannam et al., 2006, p. 2) puts it, ‘[d]ifferential mobility empowerments reflect structures and hierarchies of power and position by race, gender, age and class, ranging from the local to the global’. In the Chinese contexts, issues of rurality and ethnicity are arguably equally prominent and relevant. In their seminal editorial on the new mobilities paradigm, Hannam et al (2006, pp. 3-4) point out the importance of ‘tracking the power and politics of discourses and practices of mobility in creating both movement and stasis’. We thus echo Forsey’s (2017, p. 67) call through ‘documenting the different forms and types of [educational] mobility discourse’ in China with a view to ‘advanc[ing] understanding of how inequality is reinforced in a highly mobile modernity and might even suggest ways of ameliorating these effects’. To this end, we point to complex

entanglements of power and structure as embodied in both the individuals and the Chinese nation-state as social agents.

***b) The role of the state***

The field of global higher education is intricately linked to the world's political economy and international relations. While higher education is becoming much more international and global (Marginson, 2008), its nationally-bounded nature persists. This gives rise to the nationalist discourse that renders higher education a form of diplomacy to boost national soft power (Paradise, 2012), framed under the 'global pluralism and national competition' narrative, especially between East Asian and Euro-American countries (Yi & Jung, 2015, p. 776). This discursive framework presents a fluid, multi-polarised international environment in which any country with the right suite of policies and institutions can increase its power and ascend to positions of dominance. For China, during the few decades since the 'Opening-Up' policy in the late 1970s, it was seen as an untapped market for potential international students to go to universities located in the US, the UK, Australia, Germany and France. However, the Chinese government has, as Yi and Jung (2015) argue, quickly asserted its ambition to become a major player in the international higher education market by articulating a direct linkage between inbound and outbound education mobilities and the resurgence / re-establishment of China's regional and global leadership. Higher education mobilities can therefore be considered as 'as a part of a state's overall strategy in the pursuit of favourable international relations and higher education capacity development' (Pan, 2013, p. 259).

Central to this global pluralism and national competition discourse is the notion of 'global talent wars' in which '[t]hose countries that do not offer attractive compensation packages or do proactive searches or facilitate immigration and generate strong internal human resources through their education systems will lose out, with profound consequences for their economies'

(Paradise, 2012, p. 201). To this end, some of China's recent acts may be precisely what is needed, including its active moves to attract international students and scholars to study and work in China, foster international-collaborative programmes, invite joint venture universities and set up higher education branch campuses overseas (ibid.). The Chinese government's ambitious efforts have been regarded by some as an indication of its 'catching up' mentality (Jokila, 2015, p. 128) which on the one hand sees active and eager measures to encourage students and scholars to go abroad to learn from the developed countries and on the other hand strives to reserve certain aspects of the Chinese cultural heritage (Jokila, 2015).

Such a 'catching-up' mentality demonstrates China's subscription to and recognition of the hierarchical global higher education arena, in which Euro-American HEIs dominate and set the standards for the rest of the world to follow and conform to (Marginson, 2008). In any case, the Chinese state's strong role in shaping its HE development seems uncontested, as supported by the 'developmental state thesis', which articulates China's state-directed efforts in HE mobilities to 'increase China's favourable international political and academic relations' (Pan, 2013, p. 250). In this sense, international education in the Chinese context is considered a diplomatic, rather than economic or educational issue (Wen et al., 2017). Different from the Euro-America counterparts, Pan asserts that 'the Chinese strategies do *not* result from neo-liberal ideology and have not been primarily motivated by the pursuit of economic gain' (2013, p. 250). As such, the Chinese state's 'ability and willingness to invest in – rather than profit from – the education of international students has enabled China to transform itself from Asia's largest supplier of international students to Asia's largest host country' (Pan, 2013, p. 258). This rise in status thus evokes Hayhoe and Liu's (2010) argument that China's position in the global higher education field has shifted more towards the centre instead of the peripheral positions it used to occupy. While this centre-periphery conceptualisation may be problematic due to the relational nature of global higher education (Appadurai, 1996), Hayhoe and Liu's

contention aligns with Anthony's (2017) observation that, to students from developing countries / third-world economies such as Africa, China has grown to become a new powerful provider of higher education to foreign students and symbolic power has been accorded to degrees/educational qualification obtained from China. In this sense, China has emerged as a significant alternative destination of international education and what is happening in China therefore requires research attention.

China's imagination of its position in the world, as conveyed through its higher education scene, is worthy of investigation too. While the effectiveness of such state-directed efforts as exemplified by China's government has been similarly recognised by Marginson (2011, p. 587), he further points out the caveats in interfering with academic autonomy and creativity and exacerbating social inequity within China.

Indeed, the impacts that a strong state has on individuals, especially on individuals of lower socio-economic backgrounds, warrants further investigation in the Chinese education mobilities context. From a socio-political angle, China's individualisation process which is arguably a result of its embracing of neo-liberal values and governance has engendered highly 'enterprising' subjects, who are astute in accumulating various forms of capitals in order to achieve and/or maintain distinction (Gao, 2012; Kajanus, 2015; Yan, 2009, 2010). Meanwhile, as China is becoming a more individualised society, individual students and their families are increasingly expected to internalise the ethos that they are solely responsible for the choices they make in shaping their educational trajectories (Fong, 2011; Liu & Xie, 2016). Within such a context, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as from rural areas, of lower socio-economic statuses, and from minority ethnicities tend to be the most vulnerable under strong state directives (Guo & Gu, 2016; Li, 2013; Li & Zhao, 2017). In Marginson's (2017) recent study exploring economic inequality and social mobility in East Asian countries, he traces the case of the United States where decreasing social equity was found in the 1980s

following an expansion of the middle-class and increased social equality in between the 1950s and 1970s. Marginson predicts that:

Perhaps there is a larger danger that China will [follow the American narrative], given what appears to be the stronger reproduction of stratification in China... This is partly due to the deeply entrenched rural/ urban divide, and partly because of the impact of the party-state as a social (as distinct from a political) apparatus. The party-state has the political means at its disposal to broaden social mobility, and this is one of the recurring policy themes; but in the present period, the generational transfer of party authority at the top is one of the means whereby social inequality is being reproduced (Marginson, 2017, p. 7).

It is, therefore, our contention that for the Chinese state to perform its strong ‘developmental’ and directive roles in successfully achieving China’s target of asserting its ‘rightful’ status internationally and especially in higher education, a certain degree of relative social and educational equity should be maintained internally—this is the basis of a legitimate and efficient strong state. As revealed in our typology, internal higher education mobilities in China have not only been relatively under-researched, but also reveal alarming social inequity issues that need to be urgently addressed. Moreover, due to the impacts of globalisation, higher education competition in China’s domestic markets should increasingly be considered in conjunction with a ‘globally differentiated education space’ (Tindal, Packwood, Findlay, Leahy, & McCollum, 2015, p. 98). Given China’s active strategies to export and import higher education provisions, Chinese students and their families are increasingly competing with counterparts from other parts of the world. We contend that examining China’s internal and external education mobilities in parallel can facilitate a ‘relational and contextual’



understanding of education mobilities (Waters, 2016, p. 2). Indeed, there are reasons to believe that domestic education mobilities can ‘make or break’ the ambition of China’s aspirations.

## **2. Current lack of longitudinal studies**

In the interest of clarity, we recognise that our discussion of the typology thus far may risk being regarded as portraying higher education mobilities in China as necessarily one-way or unidirectional. We, therefore, wish to highlight that in practice such mobilities are dynamic, multiple and multi-directional. For instance, at the institutional level, there are increasing numbers of joint-degree and double-degree programmes offered by Chinese and foreign institutions (Hou et al., 2014), and also bi-directional students exchanges and movements (Author 1, Forthcoming-b). Many institutions and programmes can simultaneously engage in multiple forms and directions of education mobilities. At an individual level, one form of education mobility can often motivate subsequent and further mobilities. For instance, Author 1’s (2018) longitudinal study (charting the period 2009-2017) has revealed that a sizeable proportion of the mainland Chinese students who migrated to Hong Kong had multiple subsequent migrations abroad and back to the mainland. In parallel, middle-class families often use private and / or joint-partnership branch universities as a stepping stone to send their children further abroad (Tsang, 2013). Most noticeably, some of the student and academic returnees discussed in this typology can be argued to embody multiple and complex migratory trajectories throughout their life courses (Zweig, Changgui, & Rosen, 2004). Guo (2016, p. 314) vividly portrays Chinese Canadians in Beijing who embody ‘evolving and changeable’ transnational travel plans that are contingent upon a ‘perennial openness to further movement’. The multiple, circular and multi-directional nature of such complex higher education mobilities can therefore be likened to a ‘mobility chain’ effect. As such, while in this typology it is helpful to discuss the nine separate types of mobilities in China, we maintain that it is also crucial to recognise the fluid and constantly evolving nature of education mobilities as a whole. To this

end, we argue that research of a longitudinal and/or retrospective nature can facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the multi-directional and longer-term educational mobility trajectories of both individual and institutional mobile actors. This is an area that should warrant substantial future research attention in an attempt to answer questions such as: to what extent is the ‘mobility imperative’ impacting on the decision-making processes of the state (in terms of policies), of institutions (in terms of resource allocations for transnational education for instance), and of individuals (in terms of decisions to move for educational purposes or in terms of the extent of control they have over movement for educational purposes)?

### **3. Theoretical and conceptual challenges**

Our typology has brought together a range of theoretical perspectives on Chinese higher education mobilities, both at domestic and international levels.

As rehearsed in the previous section, there are critiques on the ‘mobility imperative’ which articulate a problematic linkage between physical and social mobilities through education and reinforce the assumption that physical mobility for educational purposes is desirable and necessary for cosmopolitans. In this paper we argue that the ‘mobility imperative’ seems to valorise active, strategic mobilities, while ignoring or marginalising those who are immobile, or those with less economic and social, cultural resources to deploy to engineer their mobility trajectories. On the other hand, scholars have commonly recognised the theoretical and empirical central stage that mobility should be accorded, as reflected through study of the ‘mobility turn’. Advocates have conceptualised education mobility as a form of capital, following Pierre Bourdieu (1986), along with other forms of cultural, social and economic capitals. For instance, in her study on the academic mobility of Chinese scholars, Leung (2013, p. 313) conceptualises geographic mobility ‘as a form of capital in the field of academia’ that can be ‘converted into other forms of capital, which subsequently can be accumulated and

transformed to further mobility, both in geographical (as in subsequent overseas travelling for varied purposes) and social (as in personal and career advancement) senses' (p. 314). In their seminal work exploring the impact of international education on China's wider social structures, Xiang and Shen (2009) trace how Chinese international student returnees and their families strategically convert and transform their economic, political, social and cultural capitals to reap the optimum rewards as presented by the Chinese state and domestic labour market. Their results suggest that such conversion of capitals as manifested through such outbound educational mobility produces and exacerbates social stratification in China.

In the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, two distinctive political and ideological territories of China, cross-border higher education pursuits of mainland Chinese students in these entities have been similarly understood as the accumulation, exchange and conversion of various forms of capital (Li & Bray, 2006, 2007; Author 1, 2017a, 2017b). The notion of social capital, as extended to 'institutional social capital', has been employed to make sense of students' experiences when enrolled on transnational British degree programmes delivered locally in Hong Kong (Waters & Leung, 2013). Such a commonality shared by studies from the above suite of disciplines, including geography, anthropology, sociology and political science reveals a possibility for developing a theoretical set of tools that can allow us to appreciate and recognise the diverse forms of mobilities within Chinese education. In turn, such theoretical insights can 'significantly enliven debates and advance research agendas' (Waters, 2016, p. 2) by examining complex processes of education in a 'relational and contextual' manner and enables us to consider the interaction between structure / agency and fixity /flows (ibid.). However, we feel that much more systematic work needs to be done to proffer a more comprehensive set of tools that can allow researchers to not only engage with any specific type of educational mobility in China, but also cast a broader view on the overall

picture of education mobilities, including those in situ, and those on the move, as well as those in between, i.e. the ‘would-be’ mobile subjects.

## **Conclusion**

An important contribution of this paper is that it brings to the fore the significance of considering external higher education mobilities in conjunction with internal forms. This contribution is important not only in the context of China but in other countries such as South Africa and India. We argue that this is significant for four main reasons. *Firstly*, as Tindal et al (2015) argue, due to the impact of globalisation, the national competition of higher education is increasingly part and parcel of the international. In other words, students in China are now competing for resources not only with their compatriots, but also with those who are enrolled in branch campuses of Chinese HEIs abroad as well as international students studying in China. This is not only the case in China but in other large emergent economies such as India. *Secondly*, the internal forms of education mobilities are often catalysts of, pre-conditions or results of external education mobilities. For instance, students moving from rural backgrounds to big cosmopolitan cities may gain the inspiration and means to venture further abroad (Hansen & Thøgersen, 2015), or students from mainland China to Hong Kong/Macau/Taiwan may take these territories as a stepping stone to pursue HE further afield (Tsang, 2013; Author 1, 2018); the same could be true for institutional actors. Thus, longitudinal and / or retrospective research studies should warrant substantial future research attention. It is only when we take all the parts into consideration that we can understand more holistically the scale and nature of education mobilities in China to date and gauge their impacts on the rest of the world. *Thirdly*, it is our contention, following Marginson (2017), that internal higher education equality can have a direct impact on the future development of external higher education mobilities of China. Again, this assertion

could have implications for other fast emerging economies such as Mexico, India and South Africa. As internal education mobilities in China have been considered one of the major mechanisms to either exacerbate or equalise Chinese society, it is an important piece of the puzzle that should not be missed. Are external mobilities diverting resources from internal higher education establishments, developments and capacity building? Are external mobilities expanding China's national capacities, or are they merely serving the rich and the powerful, such as the Transnational HE provision in China (Tsang, 2013)? *Lastly*, theoretically and conceptually speaking, we advocate more systematic theoretical work that allows researchers to not only engage with any specific sub-type of educational mobility in China, but also cast a broader view on the overall picture of education mobilities, including those in situ, and those on the move, as well as those in between, the 'would-be' mobile subjects. This broader outlook on education mobility could be of value to countries beyond China, as emerging powerful nations develop their higher education systems alongside their economies.

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**Table 1: A typology of contemporary Chinese higher education mobilities**

Directions/ Agents	Home Horizontal (Geographic) Vertical (Social)	Abroad	
		Outbound	Inbound
<b>1</b> <b>Student Mobility</b>	a. West to East and Ethnic Minorities b. Rural to Urban c. Bi-directional flows between students from MLC and HK, Macau and Taiwan	Intl students abroad (Class divide and gender issues)	Intl students, initially language courses + degree seekers (Incoming students from sources where China has invested in development such as along the route of the OBOR initiative)
<b>2</b> <b>Academic Mobility</b>	a. MLC academics in HK, Macau and Taiwan b. Academics of less privileged backgrounds (e.g. rural, ethnic minority and low SES backgrounds) in urban, middle-class and ethnic-majority centres	Academics migrating and/or conducting research abroad	a. Academic returnees from China b. Foreign academic staff in China
<b>3</b> <b>Institutional Mobility</b>	a. Cross-border collaborative programmes between Hong Kong and MLC HEIs b. MLC HEIs setting up branches in China	a. Branch campuses of Chinese universities abroad b. Confucius Institutes	Franchise, Articulation, Education Hubs and Branch Campuses of foreign HEIs in China

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> When discussing academic mobilities, we refer mainly to faculty members at higher education institutions, both tenured and non-tenured. However, due to the complexities and messiness of data available, sometimes such data quoted may also refer to post-doctoral researchers in relatively precarious employment.

Regarding institutional mobilities, we recognise that in Sino-foreign joint education endeavours, institutions and programmes are separated and are often operated in distinctive ways. However, for the benefit of space, in this typology we have decided to group such joint institutions and programmes under the category of ‘institutional mobilities’.

We also acknowledge that an additional aspect of higher education mobilities in China encompasses knowledge mobilities (Jöns, Heffernan, & Meusburger, 2017). However, there has been little research in this area concerning higher education in China. Therefore, we have not included this in this typology. We, however, believe that in the future our typology could be enriched by including this additional aspect.

<sup>ii</sup> Soft power is usually conceived of as relating to a country’s diplomacy, attraction and persuasive power in steering other nations towards the pursuit of shared goals (Nye, 2011, pp. 20-21).