

# **The Influence of Globalization Backlash on Higher Education Internationalization in China**

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## **Abstract:**

This paper explores the complex dynamics shaping the internationalization of higher education in the context of rising globalization backlash. It examines how shifting political landscapes, growing nationalism, and anti-globalization sentiments impact China's strategies for engaging with global academic networks and partnerships. The study highlights the challenges faced by Chinese institutions in navigating a dual mandate: fostering international collaboration while addressing domestic pressures for cultural and academic sovereignty. It further investigates the implications of these trends for student mobility, research collaboration, and the overall quality of higher education in China. By analyzing policy responses and institutional adaptations, the abstract underscores the necessity for Chinese higher education to redefine its internationalization goals amidst an evolving geopolitical landscape, emphasizing resilience and innovation as critical to sustaining its global presence.

**Keywords:** Globalization Backlash, Higher Education, Internationalization, Nationalism

## **I. Introduction**

Globalization has fundamentally reshaped the higher education sector across the globe, fostering international collaboration, enhancing student mobility, and promoting cross-border academic partnerships. However, in recent years, a notable shift has occurred, characterized by a growing backlash against globalization, marked by rising nationalism, economic protectionism, and cultural preservation movements[1]. This backlash has profound implications for higher education systems, particularly in countries like China, which has historically embraced internationalization as a pathway to economic and academic advancement. China's higher education system has undergone significant transformation since the late 20th century, transitioning from a largely insular model to one that actively engages with global academic networks. As the world's largest source of international students, China has positioned itself as a key player in global higher education, attracting foreign institutions

and scholars while sending millions of its students abroad. However, the recent wave of globalization backlash, fueled by domestic political changes and international tensions, poses new challenges to this trajectory[2, 3]. The rise of nationalist sentiments within China has led to an increased emphasis on cultural sovereignty, prompting educational policymakers and institutions to reconsider their approaches to international collaboration and student mobility. This paper aims to examine the intricate dynamics between globalization backlash and higher education internationalization in China. By analyzing the key drivers behind this backlash and its impact on institutional policies and practices, the study seeks to uncover how Chinese higher education is responding to these pressures[4]. It will explore the implications of changing government policies, the impact on student recruitment and mobility, and the alterations in research collaboration and funding. Additionally, the paper will highlight the adaptive strategies employed by Chinese higher education institutions to navigate this complex landscape, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that fosters both national interests and global engagement[5]. Ultimately, this introduction sets the groundwork for a comprehensive analysis of the influence of globalization backlash on China's higher education internationalization. As the global educational landscape continues to evolve, understanding these shifts is crucial for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders invested in the future of higher education in China and beyond[6].

Globalization, characterized by the increasing interconnectedness of economies, cultures, and societies across the globe, has significantly transformed higher education. Chinese universities are exploring data-driven education management by applying domain adaptation models. Proven effective in customer management, these models now help predict international student attrition, guiding targeted internationalization policies[7-9]. This phenomenon has facilitated the flow of knowledge, ideas, and resources, leading to a more integrated academic landscape. Institutions of higher learning have embraced internationalization as a strategic imperative, pursuing collaborative research initiatives, joint degree programs, and faculty exchanges. These global interactions have not only enriched academic environments but have also expanded opportunities for student mobility, enabling millions to pursue education abroad. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have capitalized on this trend, positioning themselves as attractive destinations for international students[10]. However, the benefits of globalization have not been universally embraced. While many nations have thrived through enhanced academic collaboration and cultural exchange, others have expressed concerns about the potential loss of cultural identity, economic disparities, and political sovereignty. These anxieties have given rise to a backlash against globalization,

manifesting as a reaction to perceived threats to national interests and cultural integrity. Globalization backlash refers to the negative sentiments and movements that arise in response to the perceived adverse effects of globalization[11]. This phenomenon encompasses a spectrum of attitudes, ranging from skepticism about the benefits of international integration to outright opposition to foreign influence in domestic affairs[12]. Factors contributing to globalization backlash include economic insecurity, job displacement, and cultural homogenization. In many countries, including China, rising nationalism has prompted a reevaluation of globalization's implications, leading to calls for policies that prioritize domestic interests over international engagement. This backlash has become increasingly pronounced in recent years, influenced by geopolitical tensions and economic disruptions, culminating in a more cautious approach to international collaboration[13].

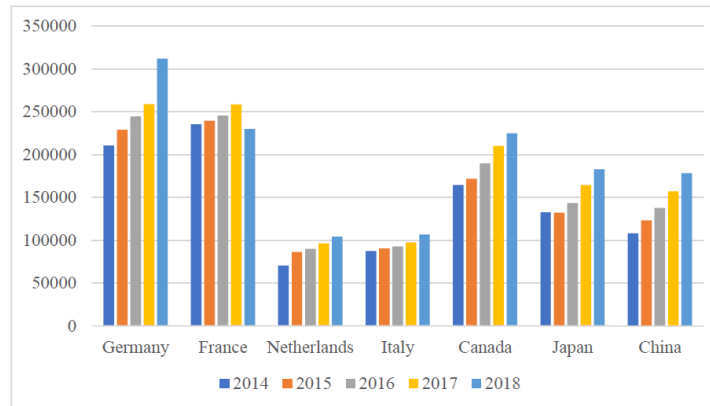
Studying the influence of globalization backlash on higher education internationalization in China is of paramount importance for several reasons. First, as one of the world's largest higher education systems, China's approach to internationalization significantly impacts global academic dynamics. Understanding how globalization backlash shapes policies and practices within Chinese institutions provides valuable insights into broader trends affecting higher education worldwide. Second, China's unique political and cultural context offers a compelling case study for examining the interplay between nationalism and globalization. The complexities inherent in navigating these forces are critical for policymakers and educators alike. Finally, as globalization continues to face challenges, exploring adaptive strategies employed by Chinese higher education institutions can inform future initiatives aimed at balancing national interests with global engagement[14]. This research not only contributes to the academic discourse on globalization and education but also holds practical implications for fostering resilient and responsive higher education systems in an increasingly interconnected world.

## **II. The Context of Higher Education Internationalization in China**

The history of higher education in China is rich and complex, with roots tracing back thousands of years to institutions such as the Imperial Academy during the Tang and Song dynasties. However, the modern landscape of higher education began to take shape in the early 20th century with the establishment of Western-style universities. Following the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, China underwent significant social and political upheaval, which prompted educational reforms aimed at modernizing the curriculum and embracing scientific knowledge. During this period, Chinese students began to study abroad, particularly in countries like the United States and Japan, leading to the formation of a nascent international academic network.

However, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the higher education system became heavily centralized and ideologically driven, with an emphasis on socialist principles[15]. International engagement was significantly restricted during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), leading to isolation from global academic communities. As a result, higher education institutions focused primarily on domestic needs and ideological training rather than international collaboration or exchange. The turning point for higher education internationalization in China came in the late 20th century, particularly following the economic reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978. These reforms opened China's economy to the world and prompted a reevaluation of educational policies. As the country sought to modernize and integrate into the global economy, the Chinese government recognized the importance of international collaboration in higher education. During this period, the Chinese government actively encouraged institutions to establish partnerships with foreign universities, leading to an unprecedented expansion of international programs, joint research initiatives, and exchange opportunities[16, 17]. The number of Chinese students studying abroad surged, fueled by government scholarships and a growing middle class eager to invest in education. By the 2000s, China had become one of the largest sources of international students globally, with many returning home to contribute to the country's economic and academic development.

Figure 1, provides a comparative analysis of the influx of students from select developed nations and China over a five-year period. The data illustrates the trend in international student mobility, highlighting how the numbers have fluctuated or remained stable across the years for each country. From the chart, the number of inbound international students from China stands out as significantly higher compared to other developed countries. China's contribution to international student enrollment saw a steady increase from 2014 to 2018, demonstrating its growing prominence as a key source of students seeking education abroad. The number appears to peak in 2017 before maintaining a similar level in 2018. In contrast, students from other developed countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, and Japan, exhibit more moderate numbers. While these countries continue to send students abroad, their figures are significantly lower compared to China's. The chart suggests that international student numbers from these countries remained relatively stable over the five years, with minor fluctuations but no drastic increases or decreases.



**Figure 1: NUMBER OF INBOUND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM SOME DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND CHINA, 2014-2018**

Data source: International Statistical Yearbook, National Bureau of Statistics of China

Additionally, while the developed countries exhibit consistent trends, none match the rapid increase seen in the number of students coming from China. This could be indicative of several factors, including China's growing middle class, increased government support for overseas education, and the rising demand for global education experiences among Chinese students. This figure underscores China's dominant role in the international education landscape and highlights the contrast in international student flows from other developed countries during the period from 2014 to 2018. Economic growth has been a primary driver of higher education internationalization in China. As the country transitioned from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented system, the demand for skilled professionals and advanced research capabilities increased significantly. The Chinese government recognized that international collaboration in higher education was crucial for fostering innovation and competitiveness. International collaboration drives the development of university programs, with cybersecurity courses enhancing research partnerships, sharing technologies, and cultivating globally-minded talent[18-20]. Investments in education were seen as essential for achieving national goals, such as becoming a global leader in technology and research. Academic collaboration has played a pivotal role in the internationalization of Chinese higher education. Partnerships with foreign institutions have facilitated knowledge exchange, joint research projects, and the sharing of best practices. The establishment of joint degree programs and research centers has allowed Chinese universities to enhance their academic offerings and improve their global rankings[21]. These collaborations have not only enriched the educational experience for Chinese students but have also positioned Chinese institutions as vital players in the global academic community. Student mobility and recruitment have also been key components of higher education internationalization in China. The influx of international students into Chinese

universities has contributed to the diversification of academic environments and cultural exchange. Chinese institutions have actively pursued international recruitment strategies to attract foreign students, enhancing their global presence and prestige. The government has implemented policies to improve the quality of education, increase English language instruction, and create a more welcoming environment for international students.

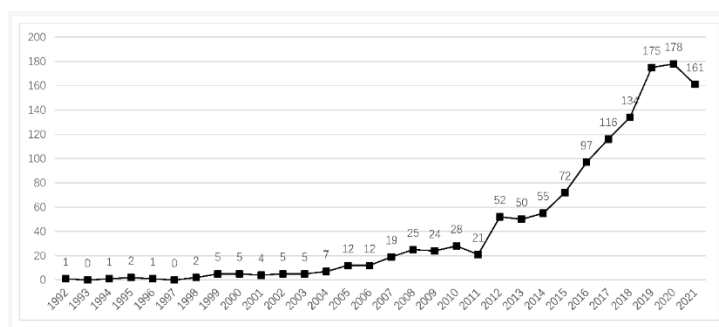
As of the 2020s, several trends are shaping the current landscape of higher education internationalization in China. There is a growing emphasis on the quality of international collaborations, with Chinese institutions seeking partnerships that contribute to research excellence and innovation[22]. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a reevaluation of internationalization strategies, leading to an increased focus on digital education and online collaborations. Hybrid models of learning and virtual exchanges have gained prominence, enabling institutions to maintain global connections despite travel restrictions. In summary, the historical overview of higher education internationalization in China reveals a dynamic journey from isolation to active engagement on the global stage. The interplay of economic growth, academic collaboration, and student mobility has driven this transformation, with current trends reflecting a commitment to maintaining China's position as a key player in the global higher education landscape.

### **III. Impact of Globalization Backlash on Higher Education in China**

In recent years, the Chinese government has implemented nationalistic policies that significantly influence the landscape of higher education internationalization. As rising nationalism shapes public sentiment, there has been a notable push for policies that prioritize domestic interests over international collaborations. This shift reflects a desire to bolster national sovereignty and reduce dependence on foreign educational systems, which are perceived as potentially undermining Chinese culture and values. These nationalistic sentiments have resulted in more stringent regulations governing international partnerships. Universities are now required to conduct thorough assessments of foreign collaborations to ensure alignment with national goals[23]. These policies often create barriers for international institutions seeking to establish joint programs, thus limiting the potential for knowledge exchange and collaborative research. This environment fosters a perception that international partnerships might compromise local educational integrity, leading to hesitancy among institutions to engage in cross-border initiatives. The Chinese government has also imposed restrictions on foreign institutions and programs operating within the country.

Figure 2, illustrates the figure shows the number of studies conducted on international students in China over a specified period. It highlights the growing research interest in this field as

China's role as a global educational hub expands. The graph reveals a steady increase in the number of studies from the early 2000s, reflecting China's rising appeal to international students, especially after the implementation of initiatives to internationalize its higher education system. In the early years, studies on international students were relatively sparse, with fewer than ten published annually. This can be attributed to the limited number of international students in China at the time and the country's early stage in developing its educational infrastructure to attract foreign learners. As China invested heavily in educational reforms and introduced government scholarship programs such as the Chinese Government Scholarship (CGS), the number of studies began to rise.



**Figure 2:** The number of studies on international students in China.

The figure shows a significant jump in research activity around 2010, which coincides with a substantial increase in the enrollment of international students, particularly from Asia, Africa, and Europe. The growing research interest likely reflects the need to understand the experiences, challenges, and contributions of this diverse student population to improve policies and support systems. By 2020, the number of studies peaked, reflecting China's status as one of the top destinations for international education. Researchers have explored various aspects, including academic performance, cultural adaptation, policy impacts, and the role of international students in China's soft power strategy. The increasing trend in the number of studies suggests that the internationalization of education in China will continue to be a key area of academic inquiry in the coming years. Recent regulations require foreign universities to partner with local institutions if they wish to offer degree programs in China, leading to a significant reduction in the number of independent foreign institutions. This requirement aims to ensure that educational content aligns with Chinese standards and values, reinforcing a preference for homegrown educational approaches. Furthermore, certain foreign programs and curricula have faced scrutiny, particularly those perceived to promote ideologies or values inconsistent with Chinese policies[24-26]. The government's increased oversight of foreign

educational content has led to concerns about academic freedom and the diversity of educational offerings available to students. These restrictions are reshaping the international educational landscape in China, making it more challenging for foreign institutions to attract students and collaborate with local universities.

The changes in government policies and regulations have had a tangible impact on student mobility and recruitment. While China once welcomed a large influx of international students, recent trends indicate a decline in international student enrollment. Factors such as heightened scrutiny of foreign educational content, the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and increased competition from other countries have contributed to this decline. Many prospective international students now view studying in China as less appealing, fearing restrictions on academic freedom and limited exposure to diverse viewpoints. Additionally, the perception of a more nationalistic educational environment may deter international students who seek a more open and inclusive academic experience[27]. As a result, universities in China may struggle to maintain their international student populations, potentially impacting the diversity and global perspectives within their educational ecosystems. In light of declining international enrollment, Chinese higher education institutions are increasingly focusing on domestic students and cultural education. The government's push for cultural education and the promotion of Chinese values in higher education has gained momentum. Institutions are being encouraged to emphasize domestic educational priorities and align curricula with national identity and heritage. This shift not only reflects a desire to nurture a sense of patriotism among students but also aims to address the skills gap in the domestic workforce. As universities redirect resources and attention toward domestic students, there is a potential risk of further marginalizing international collaboration and the diversity that international students bring. Government policies are also affecting research collaboration and funding in higher education. As nationalism takes center stage, there has been a noticeable shift towards domestic research priorities. The Chinese government emphasizes research areas that align with national development goals, such as technology, energy, and public health, often at the expense of international research collaborations. This realignment of funding and support tends to prioritize projects that serve immediate national interests, reducing incentives for collaborative research that addresses global challenges. The implications of these changes in research priorities are profound for global academic partnerships. As Chinese institutions focus more on domestic agendas, opportunities for joint research projects with foreign universities may decline. Collaborative initiatives that previously flourished may be sidelined as institutions prioritize funding for research that addresses national priorities over international issues. This



shift could hinder global knowledge exchange and diminish the potential for innovative solutions that arise from collaborative efforts across borders. In conclusion, the changes in government policies and regulations surrounding higher education internationalization in China reflect a complex interplay between nationalism, domestic priorities, and international collaboration. These developments have significant implications for student mobility, recruitment, and research collaboration, posing challenges for both Chinese institutions and their global partners in navigating the evolving landscape of higher education.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the influence of globalization backlash on higher education internationalization in China reflects a complex interplay between national identity, economic aspirations, and the pursuit of academic excellence. As the Chinese government adopts more nationalistic policies and imposes restrictions on international partnerships, the landscape of higher education is undergoing significant transformation. These changes have led to a decline in international student enrollment, a renewed focus on domestic students and cultural education, and a shift in research priorities toward national interests. While these developments may strengthen China's commitment to its own educational goals, they also pose challenges to the vibrant exchange of ideas and collaborative research that globalization has historically facilitated. The future of higher education internationalization in China will hinge on finding a balance between fostering a robust domestic educational system and maintaining meaningful connections with the global academic community. This equilibrium is crucial for addressing global challenges, enhancing innovation, and ensuring that Chinese institutions continue to play a pivotal role in the international higher education arena.

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