



**UNIVERSITY OF
ALBERTA**

Higher Education Exchange as Knowledge Diplomacy

**Wei Liu, PhD
University of Alberta International**

Goals for Higher Education Exchange

- **The liberal and educational goal aims to prepare students with the ability to participate fully in the global world.**
- **The instrumental, competitive goal takes international education as a means to maximise profit, ensure economic growth and sustain development.**
- **The idealistic transformative goal perceives international education as a force for social transformations of the world we live in.**

Stier, J. (2004). Taking a critical stance toward internationalization ideologies in higher education: Idealism, instrumentalism and educationalism. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 2(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1476772042000177069>

The Economic Focus

- **Internationalization has been increasingly motivated by profits rather than by either government policy or goodwill (Yang, 2002).**
- **Traditional values such as exchange and cooperation, peace and mutual understanding, human capital development, and solidarity have been pushed to the side for the purpose of competition, revenue, and reputation/branding (de Wit, 2020).**

Yang, R. (2002). *Third delight: The internationalisation of higher education in China*. New York & London: Routledge.

de Wit, H. (2020). Internationalisation of higher education: The need for a more ethical and qualitative approach. *Journal of International Students*, 10(1), i–iv.

The Political Focus

- **International education is also increasingly used as a way to enhance a country's political influence through soft power development (Lomer, 2017).**
- **Soft power is a concept developed in the late 1980s to refer to one country's ability to influence the behavior of others (Nye, 2004).**

Nye, Joseph. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

Lomer, S. Soft power as a policy rationale for international education in the UK: a critical analysis. *High Educ* 74, 581–598 (2017).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0060-6>

Knowledge Diplomacy

- **The field of international higher education needs to transition from an ideological focus on soft power to a global focus on knowledge diplomacy (Knight, 2020).**
- **“Knowledge diplomacy is a new approach to understanding the role of international higher education in strengthening relations among countries and addressing common global challenges.” (Knight, 2020, p 38).**

Knigh, J. (2020). Knowledge Diplomacy. *International Higher Education*, (100), 38-39. Retrieved from <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ihe/article/view/14243>

The Global Academic Leadership Development (GALD) Program

- I hope to share a couple of programs as examples to show the role of higher education exchanges between China and Canada in promoting knowledge diplomacy at the people to people level, despite the ideological differences and the occasional political tensions.
- The GALD program is a professional development program for Chinese university administrators (over 800 participants from about 200 universities in past 10 years)

Liu, W. (2019) "Education Abroad" for International Student Advisors: What is the impact on their professional development? *Journal of International Students*. 9(1): 303-316.

Liu, W. (2021). Higher Education Leadership Development: An International Comparative Approach. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. 24(5), 613-631.

Chinese scholars' observations in Canada

“(one) participant shared his observation of the humanistic and caring culture in Canada beyond the university campus: kneeling buses to provide accessibility of public facilities to the disabled; people talking more quietly in public; holding doors for people coming behind; saying hi to strangers; standing to the right on escalators; saying thanks to bus drivers; and saying “sorry” all the time.” (Liu, 2019, p 317)

“When I first came to Canada, I felt guilty when drivers stopped to let me cross the road. I would run to save the driver’s time. If cars do this in China, they won’t go anywhere for a whole day, as there are so many people. [...] And Canadians are so friendly. They always smile and say hi. Again in China, you won’t be able to do that. There are just too many people on the street.[...]” (Liu, 2021, p 623)

Canada Learning Initiative in China (CLIC)

A consortium of 12 top Canadian research-intensive universities formed with the goal to increase Canadian students' participation in study abroad in China.

The program has supported over 850 Canadian students to pursue their study abroad opportunities in China since 2016.

Huang, C., Weir, D. & Liu, W. 2022. Education Abroad as Knowledge Diplomacy: A Consortium Approach to Increasing Students' Participation in Study in China. *Comparative and International Education*. To be published.

Observations in China

“I never felt uncomfortable going out by myself, even when I left the big cities and went to explore China’s rural areas. I went to Shanghai. I went camping on the Great Wall. I went hiking. As a young woman from a Western country, I never dreaded traveling on my own. I never felt insecure or came across issues I couldn’t deal with. I didn’t lose my calm even when I missed my train back to Beijing. With the help of Tik Tok and a translation app, I purchased my ticket for the next train...”

“I notice the negative images of China perpetuated by Western media, but I encountered people with the same dreams and aspirations as anyone else. In China, I met normal people trying to earn a degree, hold down a job, and raise a family.”

Higher education exchange as knowledge diplomacy

- These small observations and experiences show students/scholars' increased awareness of the demographic, economic and cultural contexts of both countries.
- The experiences help promote people to people understanding and an enlightened nationalism, and reduce xenophobia, fear and ethnic distance.
- The experiences give students and scholars' deep appreciation of each other's people with a focus on similarities and common destiny instead of differences and national competition.
- Knowledge diplomacy should be pursued more as a goal in higher education exchanges.