

## A Comparison between Pedagogical Approaches in UK and China

Bowen Zhang<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*University of Manchester, UK*

\*Corresponding author: Email: [bowen.zhang-6@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:bowen.zhang-6@manchester.ac.uk)

Address: University of Manchester, UK

### ABSTRACT

With globalization increasingly define the world, international students are undertaking an important agentic role in terms of communicating different cultures. Therefore, their experiences are significant in revealing the pedagogic practices between different country settings. This article attempts to compare pedagogic practices between the UK and China by examining their cultural origins and the potential connections with pedagogical assumptions, placing on a spectrum of teacher/learner-centered pedagogy. Combining with the perspective of Chinese international students who have been studying in the UK, it captures the lived experiences of the actual classroom differences experienced by these students. It concludes with each pedagogy has its benefits and drawbacks respectively, and has its cultural fits, therefore, it is not possible for one particular educational system to completely 'borrow' pedagogic practice.

*Keywords:* higher education, international student, mobility, teacher/learned-centered pedagogy

### INTRODUCTION

Globalization contributes to the increase of international students' mobility, especially the flow of non-Western students to the Western ones. The number of international students receiving higher education in the UK, according to UK Council for International Student Affairs (2018), during the period 2015 to 2016, has reached 91,215, which has not only surpassed any other nationalities but also demonstrated a significant year-to-year increase. International students, who have been shaped by, at least experienced different pedagogic practices, play an important agentic role in revealing educational differences between several contexts. Pedagogic practices are usually defined on a spectrum ranging from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogy, and countries which demonstrate different tendencies on this spectrum might reflect their diverse educational assumptions, underpinning by idiographic cultural contexts. In this article, the experiences of international students in Chinese and British higher education practices will be compared and examined, as their experiences could provide valuable insight into the pedagogic practice from the perspective of students whose educational backgrounds are characterized by different pedagogic practices. Therefore, by understanding educational practices between different countries, international students can gain an ideological distance and interrogate their educational practice, to promote effective communication and minimizing unnecessary conflicts in the context of globalization. This research could also provide

insights to potential educators by comparing different pedagogic approaches, as they could learn from contexts of each other and contribute a more profound understanding of the equity issue in education.

International students are pursuing their academic goals in contexts that are underpinned by different cultural and educational values; therefore, they can experience differences in the process of being educated and comparing their education system. Making a comparison is a natural yet crucial process as it justifies choice-making and stance with regards to relationships with others and the past. Specifically, comparing educational practices, these students are currently engaging in the one they are accustomed to, they could “make the familiar strange” and deepen the comprehension of their own educational values (Alexander, 2001, p. 27). It is noticeable that students are likely to encounter ideological and pedagogical conflicts, which could be referred to as “culture shock”, happening and growing when people are striving to adapt to the new culture (Harvard International Office., 2017). Students may find themselves engaged in the academic aspect of the culture shock where teaching methods, curriculum settings, and assessment criteria are strange to them, which might reveal the different orientation of pedagogic approaches between their culture and the one in-country where they are being educated.

The teacher/learner-centered approach has been an inevitable theme throughout pedagogic approaches, which might be due to the orientation which reveals differences in many educational aspects and the epistemology that underpinned them, for example, the learner identity, teacher-learner relationship, and curriculum settings. Schweisfurth (2013) describes the teacher-centered pedagogic approach as transmissive, where emphasis in education is functioning as reproduction, requiring teachers as authoritative and knowledgeable figures. Where, a learner-centered one is more collaborative and active, with emphasis on individual involvement and critical thinking. This article aims not to make any value judgment, as it is impossible to foresee the ultimate value of a certain approach (Biesta, 2009). Therefore, while it is not possible to predict which approach would produce an ultimate desirable outcome, the comparison between pedagogy in China and UK would still provide a focus on differences in educational assumptions and implications in an international classroom.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Culture-specific pedagogy**

Cultural differences are important in explaining the divergences in Chinese and UK pedagogy. This article adopts the assumption that “all education has national characteristics and grow and develop only in the soil of its indigenous culture and given social conditions” (Ma, 2001, p. 81). Street (1993) suggests that culture should be understood in terms of a process rather than a structured cultural description, which interprets the making of culture as an ongoing process, avoiding the tendency of stereotyping and overgeneralizing. In the next sections, this article will attempt to demonstrate the connections between culture and pedagogy in China and the UK respectively, and concerning literature depicting the culture shock encountered by international students learning in these two countries.

### **Learner-centered Pedagogy in the UK**

The largely learner-centered pedagogy engaged by UK higher education reveals educational assumptions that could be traced back in history. Freire (1993, p.164) criticizes the traditional pedagogy as a “banking” approach, which is characterized by knowledge isolating from reality, students memorizing contents without thinking and questioning, and creativity and personality of students which are suppressed. He encourages the development of “critical consciousness” as an alternative to abandoning the passive and oppressed situation undertaken by students, instead, they could recognize themselves as world transformers

with the help of critical consciousness. The anti-authoritarian orientation strongly expressed by Freire has been extremely influential in the initiation and growth of the concept “critical pedagogy”, aiming for individual liberation and emancipation of the oppressed (Burbules & Berk, 1999). To form critical consciousness and achieve the emancipation of individuals, it is important for human beings to become skeptical towards authority instead of believing and absorbing blindly without questioning, as Paul and Binker (1990, p. 66) illustrate that “the art of explicating, analyzing, and assessing these “arguments” and “logic” is essential to leading an examined life”. Therefore, the tradition of being critical was started relatively early in Western educational history, leading to an emphasis on fostering critical thinking skills.

Critical thinking is arguably one of the most significant characteristics of a learner-centered pedagogy. The idea of critical thinking is prominent throughout education, and it is always connected to rationality, which, according to Burbules and Berk (1999), is seen as a paramount aim of education in the Western world. Technically, the skill of critical thinking is generally educationally desirable, standing on the exact contrary to the banking approach, characterizing skepticism and the emphasis on rationality, and does not accept truth in an unquestionable manner (McPeck, 2016). The emphasis on rationality and evidence has been included and reflected in higher education assessment criteria in the UK, especially in academic writing. For example, A-Level, the formal assessment for pre-university students entering higher education in the UK, includes “thinking skills” as a subject, which aims to examine the ability “to analyze unfamiliar problems, devise problem-solving strategies, and evaluate the diverse ways a problem may be solved” (Cambridge Assessment., 2018). To think independently and objectively is believed to be an essential skill to succeed in higher education and further professional development in the UK, which also non-surprisingly becomes one of the most evident aspects of Chinese students suffering from learning shock. In the study conducted by Gu and Schweisfurth (2006), a student expresses concern towards writing style in university assignments, particularly the use of references. To synthesize references into arguments could reflect the necessity of rationalized statements and the development of the line of arguments; therefore, to critically analyze references reflects the desirable level of skepticism. So, Chinese students, who have been educated in an educational environment that put less attention on fostering critical thinking skills, might find it unfamiliar and difficult to cope with this type of thinking and writing skill set.

Learner-centered pedagogy could also be greatly defined by power relations in the classroom. Hofstede (2003, p. 98) uses “power distance” to describe “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. From the discourse of learner-centered pedagogy, the culture characterized by a relatively low power distance might be a better cultural fit for learner-centered pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is ideologically anti-authoritarian; therefore, teachers are expected to act as a facilitator in the learning process of students instead of considering themselves knowledgeable and simply passing down knowledge to students. Concerning the authority of a teacher, the learner-centered pedagogy “demands a rethinking of classroom power relations, increasing learner autonomy...and creating space for students to ask questions which teachers with limited subject knowledge might not be able to answer” (Schweisfurth, 2013, p. 54). Teachers do not recognize themselves as an absolute authority who always have final say to the problems emerged by students, and students, instead of relying heavily on the knowledge of teachers, depending on their explorations and discussions to pursue answers, could also mean that they are assuming greater responsibilities for their learning. In the sense of independent learning and learning responsibilities, one of the Chinese students experienced learning shock because he would merely complete tasks assigned by teachers back in China without

producing anything original, however, he felt the need to conduct research himself to address problems (Gu and Schweisfurth, 2006). Therefore, a more equal relationship between teachers and students in the UK relates to greater autonomy as well as learning responsibilities compared to their China counterpart.

However, learner-centered approach is subject to critiques. Biesta (2009, p.39) criticizes learner-centered approach as essentially “a form of therapy that is more concerned with the emotional well-being of pupils and students than with their emancipation”, which creates further risks for students as they might acquire neither emancipation nor knowledge. Concerns are rising as the learner-centered approach appears less secure and predictable in achieving intended learning outcomes (Hussey & Smith, 2003), therefore it is important to evaluate its cultural fitness when applied in an educational environment that is more examination-orientated.

### **Teacher-centered Pedagogy in China**

According to Hu (2002), “Chinese culture of learning” refers to a complete system of educational assumptions, norms, behaviors, and values with the idiographic nature of Chinese society, which tend to be deeply rooted in culture and sometimes difficult to challenge in Chinese teaching and learning practices. Therefore, with relatively strong culture-oriented educational practices in China, it might be considered as a demanding process for international students to adjust to pedagogy characterized by Chinese educational assumptions, especially for those who have been brought by a radically different educational discourse.

On a continuum of learner/teacher-centered pedagogy, classrooms in Chinese higher education tend to be more teacher-centered. Jin and Cortazzi (2006) describe the observed Chinese class as teacher-centered interaction of a high level, with an evident belief of the benefits of role modeling, while students are expected to learn and memorize. They also point out that this educational model persists in the higher education setting, learners sometimes are advised to memorize a prescribed list of vocabulary or paragraphs from the textbook in university education. In such a context, the ability of critical thinking is less emphasized, requiring memorizing instead of understanding and analyzing. An international student in a Chinese university finds this type of academic standard skeptical, he reports having to take exams where books are allowed in exam venues, which is merely “a long exercise in copying” (Matthews, 2015). Although it is sometimes considered as same as “rote-learning” and being deprecated by the Western educational context, it reflects a more or less influence of Confucian tradition (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; Hu, 2002). The passive form of receiving knowledge is justified based on the assumption which values the accumulation of theoretical knowledge, especially those that have been written in textbooks, instead of putting it into immediate practice (Hu, 2002). For instance, language education in China tends to focus on the theoretical aspect such as grammar instead of real-life communication skills. Therefore, teachers as the possessor of theoretical knowledge would not-surprisingly become the center in the classroom setting, opposing learner-centered pedagogy which encourages students to actively analyze authoritative knowledge. Although it is inappropriate to assume all Chinese students would take this culture of learning for granted, it remains relevant and influential in modern China (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). In certain educational settings, for example, language education, the effectiveness of the teacher-centered approach is questionable from the Western perspective (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006). Therefore, it is a question worth considering whether one single type of pedagogic approach could be applied to every educational setting, and to what extent it could be complemented by its alternative.

The tendency towards teacher-centered pedagogy does not only reveal the lack of learning responsibilities associating with students, but also implicates the role of a teacher is related to high authority.

One of the reasons that might explain the situation is the absolute respect for education in China, a traditional Confucian thought holds a firm belief in the transforming function of education, both in the sense of mentally transforming people, making them think beyond mundane lives, as well as strengthening a nation (Hu, 2002). The “ideal” Chinese students are supposed to be “determined, diligent, and prepared to endure hardships they routinely encounter” (Li, 2002, p. 263), demonstrating a strong disciplinary implication on attitudes towards learning instead of the learning skills.

Great efforts and inputs, which might result from decent learning attitudes are emphasized in an examination-oriented Chinese educational context, as they are often believed to lead to good examination performances, as in Chinese culture, the ability is considered as acquired rather than innate (Hu, 2002). The teacher-centered pedagogy adopted by the Chinese education system is regarded as effective in achieving good grades in exams, therefore, students would pay special attention when teachers covering contents that will appear in the exams, other contents might be regarded as irrelevant and unimportant. The examination-oriented phenomenon is described by Hu and West (2014, p. 256) as “almost every activity taking place in the education system revolves around achieving better results in graduation examinations”. This particular orientation could also find its Confucian origin, as it is believed people with less prestigious and wealthy families could find their ways moving upwards through social mobility, with the help of education (Lee, 1996), and examination is thought to be their last resort.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research intends to find out the differences between the pedagogy conducted in the UK and Chinese classroom, therefore it is important to obtain detailed descriptions from individuals who have experienced the two pedagogies. In this sense, to be accessible to details of personal experiences of Chinese teachers, an interpretivist stance has been adopted. Sticking to the very truth is an important concern for interpretivists, they “seek lived experiences in real situations” (Woods, 2006, p. 3) to be accurate, which also allows them to understand the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Although interpretivists are subject to criticisms in terms of the tendency of creating artificial boundaries (Cohen et al., 2011), subjectivity may be inevitable to add personal explanation and knowledge to the data analyzed in a more detailed and insightful manner. Particularly, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with five Chinese international students who have been educated in the UK and asked them to compare pedagogy in the UK and China. The theme “pedagogy” has been addressed in terms of asking questions about their expectations before overseas education, challenges they encountered, and their process of adapting Western pedagogy.

### **FINDINGS**

Among the interviewed Chinese returnees, there is a clear sense of “otherness” of the Western pedagogy. Their answers to the questions concerning their expectations before conducting their studies overseas reveals their awareness and deliberate preparations (whether materially or psychologically) for Western ways of teaching. Some of the interviewees mentioned that although they have not been to Western countries themselves, they still anticipate Western pedagogy to be radically different from Chinese ones through books and previous education in China. For example:

“I expect the UK has a different educational system from China, and I think there’re no certain rules or procedures to follow.”

“Since I’m studying a course in engineering, my understanding was that the UK may focus more on practical rather than skills.”

“I don’t have much understanding of Western education, but I think it’s completely different, Western education may be more open-minded and emphasize independent learning.”

One of the interviewees expressed that her anticipations and understandings come from textbook and previous undergraduate education in China:

“I used to study at a normal university in China for my undergraduate education, therefore I had learned a lot about Western pedagogies and their ways of thinking.”

Noticeably, she also partly attributed her “accurate” expectation to a foreign teacher she once had: A foreign teacher of mine has talked about the way Western classrooms are organized and operated...In his class, unlike Chinese teachers who tend to simply stand there and give a lecture, he walked around to interact with students, so there is always a vibrating atmosphere...for students like us, we don’t have to be there, the way our foreign teachers behave represents Western pedagogy.

When they arrive in Western countries and experience pedagogies themselves, all of the respondents find the reality generally matches their anticipation. After actually going abroad and experiencing a Western model of teaching, the differences between two pedagogies they have identified becomes more specific and detailed, for example, they spotted the difference of student-teacher relationship between China and Western countries they studied in, such as the classroom equity:

In a UK classroom that I’ve been in before, if we were sitting, our professor would lower himself to talk to us at the same height. Many Chinese students are not used to it, as, in China, Chinese teachers were more arrogant and condescending...UK professors also grant us enough respect, when we are expressing different opinions, although some of which they may disagree with, they still encourage us to generate different ways of thinking and creativity. This kind of thing never happened when I was doing my undergraduates in China, maybe things got slightly better when you study in a normal university as it emphasizes pedagogies. In comparison, my friends, who study in other types of universities, don’t have the chance of expressing themselves.

The different role of teachers and students adopted in China and Western countries were also pointed out, namely, in Western countries, teachers tend to be facilitators:

“I feel a little bit shock as in the UK, as there are no clear rules that are instructed by teachers. All you need to do is just attend seminars and lectures and learn by yourself. It’s quite different compared to China.”

“When I just arrived in Germany, I found that my supervisor tends not to give me specific instructions, so I have to completely rely on myself to carry on research, to find answers for every question.”

It is also noticeable that a UK and a Chinese classroom have different ways of manage, for example, different pacing:

“In China, teachers are always rushing to fill students with knowledge as much as possible. But in the UK, teachers pay less attention to the quantity of knowledge transmitted, they may be slow-paced, but emphasize fostering students’ ability.”

They pointed out the scope of knowledge that could be expanded and the extent of student participation in class:

“I feel that they have a different focus. In China, there’s more emphasis on theoretical knowledge, but in the UK, we have more chances to conduct actual engineering projects.”

There is an obvious difference in that in a Chinese classroom, students are much less active and participatory. I think the reason is what teachers taught them are essentially bound by a core textbook, leaving little space for expansion, when we're studying knowledge in a single textbook, there's only one framework, which kind of limited our outlook. In Germany it's quite different, sometimes the professor gave us a reading list containing seven or eight books, and therefore, the content could be extended considerably. In this way, our horizon could be expanded, and our interests enhanced.

"In the university I taught, mostly there are courses merely and purely focus on theory, which I think is a little bit detached from reality; In America, the courses focus more on case study instead of theory."

Another difference raised by interviewees was the different evaluative rules adopted by China and Western countries. Although they admitted that relying on examinations could be counted as one of the similarities, the two have completely different assessment criteria:

In China, the answers to examination questions are mostly fixed and standard, it is not very flexible as students have to provide "right" answers to pass the exam. Yet in Germany, it is not like your answers are marked against a set of so-called "standard answers". Instead, we conduct interviews with our supervisors, then he/she will give our marks according to our understanding and responses to a certain topic.

It can be seen from the responses from the above interviewees that the differences are manifested in various ways, whether it is the inner educational assumptions, or the pedagogic practices that are displayed on the outside. There are also similarities between the two, however these similarities are confined to some basics:

"The two education systems are all campus-based, they both require the role of teachers and students...and they all prefer a face-to-face knowledge-transmitting process."

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Generally, the findings reveal that Chinese international students did process a certain level of expectation based on their previous knowledge obtained from reading or other related intercultural experiences. Although the preparations they made beforehand do not always guarantee the adaptation in the Western environment, their expectations seemed to have matched the reality. This could be an indicator of the level of globalization of China. Although China and UK have radically different cultures and ideologies, education in China grants students with a generally accurate description of the West. In the responses of participants, it is not uncommon for them to make comparisons between China and the West, whether consciously or not. Their inclination for making comparison confirms arguments made by Alexander (2001a, p. 521) on comparative education: "globalization dictates a stronger comparative and international presence in educational research".

Noticeably, some of the participants pointed out the differences in terms of transmitting knowledge: Chinese teachers teach, Western teachers guide. In other words, Chinese pedagogy is more teacher-centered while Western countries have more learner-centered pedagogy. A teacher-centered pedagogy could be argued to be attributed to the deep reverence Chinese people have for education and being teacher-centered reinforced the authoritarian status of the teacher in the classroom. Western students who have experienced classroom discipline in China are encountering dilemmas when they return to their home country, as Moneton (2017) felt guilty for attempting to check her phone in class when she returns. The stress on

learning attitudes might essentially reflect an authoritarian perspective on the knowledge which regards teachers as a more important figure in a classroom setting. However, the experiences of students are somehow being neglected, when they are equally important in the classroom as teachers. Moneton (2017) also spots in the Chinese university she studied, it is unnatural for students packing up before the professor declared the end of the class. This might be due to the behavior implies both disrespects to the teacher and a lack of decent learning attitude, i.e., a disrespect for both authority and education.

Participants argue that the teacher-centered pedagogy approach may jeopardize the independent thinking ability of students as students rely on teachers excessively instead of their own critical thinking. However, in this case, students are not the ones to blame, as they are simply attempting to survive the examination-centered educational tradition. Being examination-centered is thought to have a Confucian tradition, as getting an excellent grade in exams is regarded as the last resort for less wealthy or prestigious families to move upwards through social mobility (Lee, 1996). Nowadays, through Gaokao (National higher education entrance examination), those with good grades have the opportunity to enter elite universities and gain a prominent employment perspective. A teacher-centered approach, although subject to criticisms of suppressing personality and creativity, seems to serve the purpose of enhancing students' examination grades. Therefore, it can be seen that Chinese students have a long tradition of getting used to a classroom characterized by strong framing, which emphasizes effectiveness and intensity of knowledge transmission.

In comparison, topics generated by participants when they are describing their Western experiences often include a more equal teacher-student relationship, emphasizing ability-fostering, linking knowledge to reality, and more flexible evaluative criteria. These themes, in line with literature on international students, suggest a weakly-framed UK classroom, which demonstrates an emphasis on the foster of critical thinking skills in UK higher education. The design of a Western class often focuses on fostering students' critical thinking skills and independent learning ability, which is largely different from Chinese higher education. The relatively weak framing happens when teachers recognize themselves as facilitators instead of authoritarian figures. Compared to Chinese pedagogies, Western ones also seem to demonstrate a weaker classification. One of the participants suggested that in Chinese classrooms, students are less active and participatory, and he attributes the reason for the scope of knowledge that could be expanded is limited. This argument coincides with Doherty (2015), who argues that a strong classification involves transferring highly specialized knowledge, which students may find detached from reality and they are uninterested to learn. This participant also gives the example of reading lists given by his Western teachers, which reduces the specialty of knowledge and extends classroom expertise. Besides, compared to Chinese examinations which require standard answers for every question, flexible evaluative criteria also allows students to be as critical as possible. It can be seen that Western countries and China have different educational assumptions, therefore, the clash of ideologies occur in the context of Chinese international students studying abroad.

The main differences of UK and Chinese pedagogy are summarized below:

Firstly, UK higher education tends to emphasize the fostering of critical thinking, and encourages students to be authority-challengers, facilitating students to rationalize and focus on the precision and accuracy of information (e.g., the importance attached to using references correctly). The relatively weak framing happens when teachers perform as facilitators instead of authoritarian figures. Compared to Chinese pedagogy, UK ones also seem to demonstrate a weaker classification. In contrast, the higher education in China is largely empirical, which focuses on understanding the content instead of critically



analyzing it, accuracy and rationalization are therefore undermined, implying a philosophical foundation of educational discourse.

Secondly, Chinese higher education attaches greater importance to the role of discipline, revealing a high level of reverence for the role of teacher authority. Therefore, the learning attitude is stressed, and students are supposed to be diligent and hardworking, which is also believed to contribute to good grades in examinations, implying an authoritarian perspective of education. UK higher education, in radical difference, focuses more on learning skill instead of learning attitude, implying the role of the teacher as a facilitator rather than dominator in a classroom setting and a more equal teacher-learner relationship, maximizing learning responsibilities associated with students.

Thirdly, the Chinese higher education system is much more examination-oriented compared to its UK counterparts. Acquiring good grades in an examination justifies any learning behavior of students and might be the most important motivation for the learning of students. However, it is noticeable that the marking criteria against examinations in China largely examines the level of understanding of what has been taught, and a high score could be achieved if the understanding is in accordance with the marker. In contrast, the assessment in UK higher education values critical thinking abilities demonstrated, in which creativity, originality, and output are of great importance.

Lastly, in terms of cultural equivalence, Chinese culture tends to place more value on degrees of higher education, as the Chinese possess a firm belief that knowledge transforms fate through education, and since China is based on a large population, higher education becomes a scarce resource which is not possible for everyone to access. In Bernstein's terms, the Chinese classrooms are stronger framed while UK has weaker framed pedagogies. A teacher-centered pedagogy, characterized by stronger framing, could be attributed to the deep reverence Chinese people have for education, and being teacher-centered reinforced the authoritarian status of the teacher in the classroom. In comparison, the UK involves much more diversity and options for the definition of being successful which includes but is not limited to gaining access to higher education. It also reveals the difference in the level of individualism between the two countries, as making an effort to receive higher education is increasingly regarded as mainstream and the norm in Chinese society, which is important for members in a collectivistic society to adapt to the group norms (Hofstede, 2003). However, in a society that emphasizes individualistic value and learner-centered pedagogy such as the UK, individual understanding matters more than group opinion.

Both pedagogies have their benefits and limitations. Since the pedagogical practices chosen to be implemented in a certain country depend on various cultural, ideological, and technical factors, it would be innocent to assume countries such as China could effectively apply learner-centered pedagogy to a large extent, and vice versa. Although the examination-oriented and standardized education system has been subject to many critiques concerning its utilitarian tendency, it might be one of the most effective ways of operating Chinese society. The large population in China makes it difficult for the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy, also, "the political context is not conducive to the emancipatory narrative" (Schweisfurth, 2013). Nevertheless, there are certain features of learner-centered pedagogy that could complement the pedagogical practices adopted in China, namely, by incorporating courses characterized by interaction and critical thinking. In UK higher education, despite the fact the relatively equal teacher-student relationship contradicts assumptions behind teacher-centered pedagogy, it could still learn from the great level of reverence for education within Chinese society. As in any society, education is arguably the most significant process for accumulating knowledge and improving society, as well as contributing to

personal development, therefore, although the existence of a physical authoritarian and disciplinary figure may not fit the UK higher education context, the need for students to respect education itself could be emphasized.

The research could be prominent in the sense that there is a noteworthy increase in the number of international students studying in foreign countries. International students who have been exposed to different pedagogies could play an important agent role in promoting effective communication as well as minimizing unnecessary conflicts. By providing an insight into their roles as agents of globalization, international students could gain a deeper comprehension of their experiences, especially with regards to their initial learning challenges in a foreign country, such as the UK, which could also convert to valuable resources in terms of their future practices.

### REFERENCES

- Alexander, R. (2001). *Culture and pedagogy: International comparisons in primary education*. Blackwell.
- Biesta, G. (2009). Good education in an age of measurement: On the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21(1), 33-46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-008-9064-9>
- Burbules, N. & Berk, R. (1999). Critical thinking and critical pedagogy: Relations, differences, and limits. In T. Popkewitz & L. Fendler (Eds.), *Critical theories in education: Changing terrains of knowledge and politics* (pp.45-65). Routledge.
- Cambridge Assessment. (2018). Cambridge international AS and A level thinking skills (9694). <http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-international-as-and-a-level-thinking-skills-9694/>
- China Power Team. (2017). Is China both a source and hub for international students? <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-international-students/>
- Cortazzi, M. & Jin, L. (1997). Communication for learning in different cultures. In R. Harris & D. McNamara (Eds.), *Overseas students in higher education: Issues in teaching and learning* (pp.76-90). Routledge,
- Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Gu, Q. & Schweisfurth, M. (2006). Who adapts? Beyond cultural models of ‘the’ Chinese learner. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 19(1), 74-89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310608668755>
- Harvard International Office. (2017). Adjusting to a new culture. <http://www.hio.harvard.edu/adjusting-new-culture>
- Hofstede, G. (2003). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Hu, B. & West, A. (2014). Exam-oriented education and implementation of education policy for migrant children in urban China. *Educational Studies*, 41(3), 249-267. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2014.977780>
- Hu, G. (2002). Potential cultural resistance to pedagogical imports: The case of communicative language teaching in China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 15(2),93-105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310208666636>

- Hussey, T. & Smith, P. (2003). The uses of learning outcomes. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 8(3), 357-368. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562510309399>
- Jin, L. & Cortazzi, M. (2006). Changing practices in Chinese cultures of learning. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 19(1), 5-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310608668751>
- Lee, W. (1996). The cultural context for Chinese learners: Conceptions of learning in the Confucian tradition. In D. Watkins & J. Biggs (Eds.), *The Chinese learner: Cultural, psychological and contextual influences* (pp.25-41). CERC and ACER.
- Li, J. (2002). A cultural model of learning: Chinese “heart and mind for wanting to learn”. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 33(3), 248-269.
- Matthews, D. (2015, September 9). News blog: What it is like to study in a Chinese university. *Times Higher Education*. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/news-blog-what-it-study-chinese-university>
- McPeck, J. (2017). *Critical thinking and education*. Routledge.
- Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (MoE). Number of students in higher education institutions. [http://en.moe.gov.cn/Resources/Statistics/edu\\_stat\\_2015/2015\\_en01/201610/t20161011\\_284371.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/Resources/Statistics/edu_stat_2015/2015_en01/201610/t20161011_284371.html)
- MoE. (2017). Number of students in higher education institutions. [http://en.moe.gov.cn/Resources/Statistics/edu\\_stat\\_2016/2016\\_en01/201708/t20170822\\_311603.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/Resources/Statistics/edu_stat_2016/2016_en01/201708/t20170822_311603.html)
- Moneton, A. (2017, January 28). Adapting to a Chinese-style education. GU Office for Global Education: Student Blog. <https://blogs.common.georgetown.edu/studyabroad/2017/01/28/adapting-to-a-chinese-style-education/>
- Schweisfurth, M. (2013). *Learner-centered education in international perspective: Whose pedagogy for whose development?* Routledge.
- Turner, Y. (2006). Chinese students in a UK business school: Hearing the student voice in reflective teaching and learning practice. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 60(1), 27-51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2006.00306.x>
- Paul, R. & Binker, A. (1990). *Critical thinking: What every person needs to survive in a rapidly changing world*. Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique.
- UK Council for International Student Affairs. (2018). International student statistics: UK higher education. <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Research--Policy/Statistics/International-student-statistics-UK-higher-education>
- Zhang, H. & Wang, X. (2014). Equity issues in China’s college entrance examination policy: The perspective of the province-based enrolment quota allocation policy. In H. Zhang, P. Chan & C. Boyle (Eds.), *Equality in education: Fairness and inclusion* (pp. 79-93). Sense Publishers.

---

**Bowen Zhang** is a PhD candidate in Education at the University of Manchester (UK). Her research is broadly situated in transnational higher education in China, with a particular focus on the epistemological exchange between Chinese and Western universities through forming educational partnerships throughout history.