

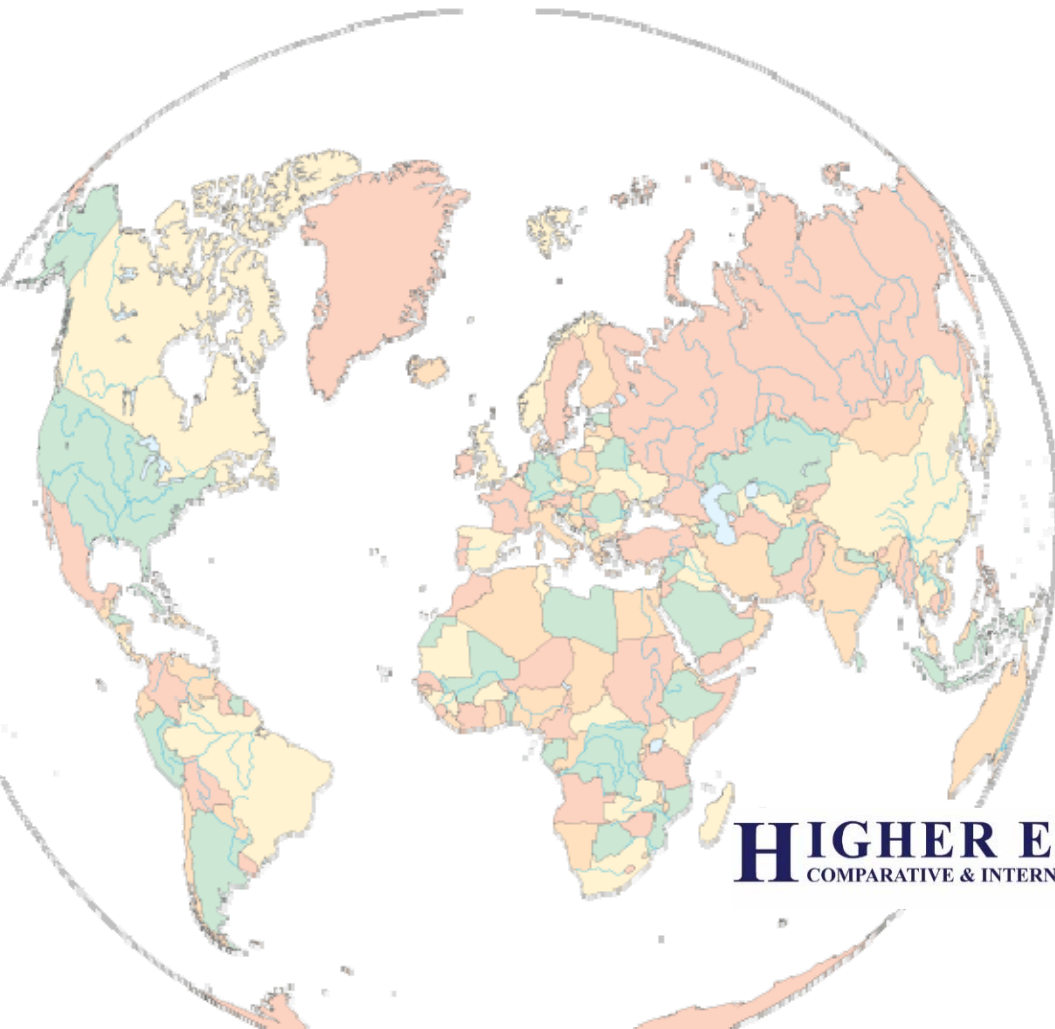
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FEATURED ARTICLES

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A Multi-Perspective Analysis: Sino-Foreign Joint Higher Education Projects in China as Policy Mediators, Critics, and Constructors

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Introduction

This article focuses on the policy-related interactions between the Sino-foreign higher education (HE) in Mainland China, including both joint branch campuses of foreign universities and cooperation programs within Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs), and the government of the Chinese HE system. After 1949, the Chinese government reestablished a highly centralized and structuralized HE system by following the Soviet model. “On the central government level, higher education was under the control of the Ministry of Education (MOE) which was in turn under the supervision of the Cultural and Educational Affairs Committee” (Hu 1961, p. 160). In 1985, the system started a process of decentralization after the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee published its decision to reform education pointing to increasing autonomy of HEIs.¹ During the last decade, many foreign universities started projects in China that have included establishing international branch campuses. Examples of those are New York University Shanghai and the University of Nottingham Ningbo. In a global perspective, as an outcome of HE internationalization and globalization, for instance, through international HE cooperation, projects should “increase local capacity and provide a different type of education” (Lane 2011, p. 367). Therefore, it is quite necessary to focus on policy interactions and policy dialogues between Sino-foreign joint HE projects and policymakers, the major administrators of the HE system in Mainland China.

Conceptual Framework

W. H. Clune (1990) provides the perspective to scrutinize the roles of schools within the policy context as policy mediators, policy critics, and policy constructors, and states that “schools can be sources of alternative policies rather than simply mediators or critics of the policies currently in force” (p. 266). Such perspective of education policy analysis is quite useful to help understand Sino-foreign HEIs in China as active actors rather than passive recipients of policy, since most of the relevant policies were formulated or reformed to fulfill the requirements of the existing joint HE projects and based on their reflections towards the previous regulations. Therefore, it seems more suitable to deal with the policy formulation and implementation processes as dialogues, which are dynamic and interactional, between policymakers and joint HE projects. Based on the original concepts of Clune’s (1990) policy-school mutual perspective, we discuss the phenomena of Sino-foreign joint HEIs and programs, including both the existing situations and present problems, as the indicators of the relevant policy innovation (as the policy mediator), policy flaws and limitations (as the policy critic), and the possible approaches to policy reform (as the policy constructor). Comparing to Clune’s (1990) original concepts, the roles of the joint HEIs are defined relatively as more passive due to the entire rigid HE administration system in Mainland China.

Policy Mediator

The development of Sino-foreign HE projects can be seen as the outcome of the education policy evolution during the last decades. In other words, the government ultimately promotes a prosperous presence of the Sino-foreign joint HE projects. From 1986 to the present, according to China's Five-Year Plans' key documents and subdocuments about education development strategies formulated by the MOE, it is obvious that the central government carefully considered the internationalization of the Chinese HE system. The policy innovation trend of internationalization can be seen as the direct political root and policy context of the implementation of the Sino-foreign joint HE projects. In 2004, the MOE published its first policy document to regulate Sino-foreign joint institutions.² In 2012, the MOE published a document about strengthening the regulation of the foreign-related schools.³ Also, a plan to regulate and evaluate Sino-foreign joint schools was published in 2014.⁴ It is clear that after a booming period of the education market, the government has adjusted its major policy purposes from simply promoting the development of international joint institutions to considering balancing their development and institutionalization. In 2013, the MOE published two reports, one about the Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools and the other about international education exchanges.⁵ These two reports explain the government's increasing concern about HE internationalization and cooperation.

An outcome of the central government's internationalization-oriented education policy innovation, according to data published by the MOE in 2014, the total number of Sino-foreign joint HE-level projects was 1,979, including 930 projects authorized by the MOE and 1,049 projects approved by provincial governments. Enrollment in HE-level joint projects was over 450,000 in 2014, which is about 1.4 percent of the total number of Sino-foreign HE-level fulltime students. In short, the development of the Sino-foreign joint HE projects clearly shows the effectiveness of relevant policy reform. The joint HEIs and cooperation programs can be seen as the mediators of the internationalization-oriented HE policy transformation.

Policy Critic

Even though being highly effective about promoting the development of Sino-foreign joint HE projects, the current policy system has flaws or limitations that have already caused several problems. They can be somehow inferred from the following issues.

First, the numbers of projects, degree levels, and majors are limited. In present China, although the total number of international cooperation HE projects is increasing rapidly, its proportion is small when compared to the entire Chinese HE system. As Genshu Lu, Hui Kang, and Ni Yan (2013) state, most of the international branch campuses and cooperation programs provide undergraduate-level courses (75.2 percent) and some of them master-level programs (22.6 percent). Only 0.9 percent of them offer doctoral-level courses and programs. According to Jia and Chen (2005), most of the degree programs offered by the Sino-foreign joint HEIs and programs are in economics/business-related majors (46 percent, including finance, marketing, and management), applied foreign language skills (19 percent), and applied electronic engineering (13 percent, including computer science).

Second, there is an unbalanced distribution of Sino-foreign joint HE projects in China. Data from 2013 show that most of the international cooperation HE programs and branch campuses are in Eastern China, the relatively more developed region (over 55 percent), while only five percent are in the 12 western provinces.

Third, there is a lack of institutional autonomy. In China, "unlike some other countries that allow foreign universities to have a free hand in setting up and running an educational enterprise, China's Ministry of Education has developed a set of rules and regulations on the presence and operation of foreign higher educational institutions in China" (Feng 2013, p. 473). Under the current policies, "no foreign university can set up a program, let alone, a campus, without partnering with a Chinese institution and the head of the offspring institution must be a Chinese citizen" (Feng 2012, p. 473). The lack of institutional autonomy exists not only in the joint HE projects, but also in the Chinese partner HEIs, since the HE system in China is highly centralized and controlled by

the central government. It is obvious that “the degree of institutional autonomy in relation to the state will have a significant impact on the institution’s attitude towards internationalization issues” (Wilkins and Huisman 2012, p. 632).

Finally, the regulation and evaluation system is incomplete. By supporting the creation of international joint HE projects, it could be expected that the direct and core benefits for the host country would be high quality HE resources and advanced administrative models from the source countries. In China, there are a few policies to evaluate the quality of education and/or to standardize the management of such joint HEIs and programs. Currently, there are seven major relevant regulations to monitor and measure teaching quality that are deemed inadequate (Chen 2013).⁶

In short, as policy critic, the existing problems of the Sino-foreign joint HE projects show that although they have rapidly increased during the past decade, government policy intervention to support the development of Sino-foreign HE projects is still limited and has flaws. The current policy system needs to be further improved.

Policy Constructor

As a new HE model in China, Sino-foreign joint HE projects represent an alternative to domestic universities or study abroad for Chinese students (Wang and Feng 2013). As mentioned before, the total enrollment of the existing joint HEIs and programs is growing fast since the current education market for such joint HE projects is a typical seller's market, which means that the demand is much greater than the supply. Within the present Chinese HE system, Sino-foreign joint HE projects provide a feasible approach to establishing more accessible and flexible HE administrative methods and providing different HE learning experiences to students. Even though the present issues can be seen as the outcome of policy innovation and government promotion, in spite of the uncontrollability and uncertainty of education policy implementation, it is still necessary for the Sino-foreign joint HE projects, especially joint HEIs, to try to become active actors in the policymaking process, rather than being passive recipients of the existing policy system.

However, current joint institutions can hardly play the role as policy constructors directly and effectively due to the highly centralized bureaucratic system in China. As well as HEIs and/or programs located in Mainland China, Western university counterparts have to adjust their previous methods of communicating with the government while facing Chinese realities. It is also necessary for the Chinese government to make the policymaking process more inclusive; otherwise, there will not be enough interaction between policymakers and institutions, which may eventually limit the policy implementation process (Hall 1993).

Furthermore, administrators of joint institutions may be able to play an active role in policymaking because of their special triple identities: administrators of Sino-foreign joint HE projects, administrators of Chinese partner universities, and government officials in the field of HE. Under the existing policy, since the head of a Sino-foreign joint project has to be a Chinese citizen (Feng 2012), administrators of joint projects are usually the administrators of the Chinese partner universities. In addition, since administrators of Chinese public universities are part of the bureaucratic system, they may be able to impact the MOE’s policymaking process as “insiders.” Therefore, they can be seen as potential actors who might be able to participate in policymaking due to their triple identities.

In addition, Sino-foreign joint projects may become an important factor in the process of educating or training future policymakers who might further promote the decentralization of the Chinese HE system. Different from the domestic public Chinese universities, the education philosophies of Sino-foreign joint HE projects tend to have more liberal classroom structures and are usually more student-centered. Furthermore, the student-professor relationship may also be quite different. Other than being trained to become obedient, at least partly guided by Western HE philosophies, students are usually encouraged to communicate with the instructors equally. Such flexible and decentralized HE experiences may create consciousness to further promoting decentralization, not only of HE policies but also of other political and socioeconomic policy areas.

Conclusion

As a very important component of the Chinese HE system and an effective factor to promote HE internationalization, Sino-foreign joint HE projects should be both fully supported and modestly regulated by the government. Based on the previous discussion through three perspectives, it seems clear that the Chinese government, its policymakers, is now facing the dilemma of either sacrificing the institutional autonomy of Sino-foreign joint HE projects to strengthen the government control over the HE system or allowing more institutional autonomy and policy flexibility to stimulate the development of joint project. In short, a question for policymakers is if there are any possible approaches to provide Sino-foreign joint HE projects with some level of administrative autonomy without risking to decreasing education quality and reputation (Zha 2012).

Evidently, after over a decade of development, the present administrative policy system that regulates the Sino-foreign joint HE projects is still developing and has room for further improvement (Yang 2014). Indeed, the major question is how the Chinese government should build a policy system and a policymaking process to use the subjective initiative of the joint HE projects to optimize the current Chinese HE system. In other words, supporting establishing international joint HE projects is not only a process of importing high quality education resources but also a process of learning from the Western educational, administrative, and policy formulation philosophies. In summary, the Sino-foreign joint HEIs and programs should not be treated and should not treat themselves as passive policy recipients but as active actors in the existing policy context. China may take great advantage from developing its soft power in the predictable future (Mok et al. 2014) through modifying its HE internationalization-related policies.

Notes

1. CPC Central Committee's Decision on Education Reform [中共中央关于教育体制改革的决定]
2. Implementation Measures of the Sino-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools [中华人民共和国中外合作办学条例实施办法]
3. MOE Announcement of Strengthening the Management of the Foreign-Related Schools [教育部办公厅关于加强涉外办学规范管理的通知]
4. Assessment Programme of Sino-foreign Cooperation Institutions [中外合作办学评估方案]
5. Report of the Sino-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools after the Education Plan implemented in the Past Three Years [教育规划纲要实施三年来中外合作办学发展情况] and The Report of the Education Cooperation and Exchanges Progress [教育对外合作与交流进展情况]
6. The 7 documents are mainly based on the People's Republic of China Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools Regulations [中华人民共和国中外合作办学条例]

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Sense of Belonging in International Students: Making the Case against Integration to US Institutions of Higher Education

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Introduction

International student mobility is at an all-time high in recent years, with the United States (US) as the top destination of choice (Institute of International Education 2015). In 2014-2015, the US welcomed 974,926 students at institutions of higher education (Institute of International Education 2015). In that year alone, student mobility to the US increased by 10 percent over the prior year, which is a significant rate of growth. All signs indicate the trend of international student mobility to the US will not abate in upcoming years.

As a result of high student mobility, many US institutions are concerned with how to welcome and transition these students to their campuses. Much of the research and current reports (e.g., Andrade 2006; Rienities, Beausaert, and Grohnert 2012; Ward and Masgoret 2009) on international students tend to focus primarily on their integration to campuses in the US. While the idea of integration appears to be innocuous and harmless, the process of integration often includes the practice of “cultural suicide” (Tierney 1999, p. 82), leading to potential distress and conflict among international students. Thus, I argue that seeking to *integrate* international students through programmatic efforts causes more harm to students’ well-being and educational success; rather, the emphasis on fostering international student success should be through increasing students’ *sense of belonging*. The case against integration is especially salient for international students in the US because they enter into a unique cultural climate that is heavily influenced by societal and historical forces. Most recently, the racially charged events at institutions such as the University of

Missouri-Columbia and Yale University indicate that higher education in the US is in a time of flux, particularly related to differences in culture and backgrounds. Due to the diverse culture of the US, a reconsideration of how we can better transition international students to living and learning at US institutions of higher education is required.

In this essay, I argue that US educators should seek to increase students’ sense of belonging rather than their integration to campus, which will provide an effective and culturally sustaining way to help international students’ transition. In the following sections, I provide an overview of concept of sense of belonging, including the problems related to integration. I follow that with making a case for using sense of belonging to examine international student experiences. Finally, I offer some suggestions for practice and research on how to conceptualize international students’ sense of belonging to campus.

Sense of Belonging: Effects on Performance and Student Success

Sense of belonging is a construct that influences students’ performance and success in college. Within a collegiate context, sense of belonging is important because many students are “inclined to feel isolated, alienated, lonely, or invisible” (Strayhorn 2012, p. 10), all of which can influence students’ persistence and satisfaction with their collegiate careers. Student success and persistence are at the forefront of student outcomes in college; thus, before a deeper discussion about sense of belonging as a construct, it is important to understand some foundational theories related to student success and persistence.

Student Integration or Cultural Suicide?

Discussions of student success and persistence often begin with Tinto's (1993) theory of individual student departure, which he asserted is related to interactions between the student and the rest of the university community. Simply stated, Tinto emphasized the importance of the interactions between individuals and the campus community as students integrate into their social and academic environments, which in turn affects students' likelihood of persisting to graduation. According to Tinto, difficulty in integrating with the campus community often stems from students' inability to separate themselves from their past experiences and challenges with adapting to a new environment. Thus, Tinto argued that the more students integrate into the mainstream social and academic structures of a university, the more likely it is for students to be successful and persist in college.

In order to better integrate with the university, Tinto (1993) proposed that students should voluntarily withdraw from the culture of their previous lives in order to better integrate with their collegiate environment. According to Tinto's model, successful integration requires a full removal from prior groups in order for students to better integrate with their new collegiate environment. However, separation from prior groups could be difficult for students, especially those from different cultures, languages, and countries of origin.

Critics of Tinto's (1993) theory argue that it places full responsibility for integration on the students and does not put enough emphasis on the institution for creating an environment that is supportive and conducive to student interactions and development, particularly for students from historically underrepresented groups (Kuh and Love 2000; Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora 2000; Tierney 1992, 1999, 2000). Tierney was particularly vocal against integration because Tinto (1993) implied that underrepresented students must abandon their cultural identities to assimilate to the mainstream campus culture. Tierney (1999) asserted that in order to integrate, racial/ethnic minority students must commit a form of "cultural suicide" (p. 82) or complete separation from

one's culture that can be detrimental to minority students' success in college. Students from underrepresented groups may not ever be able to assimilate into the dominant culture because the pressure to sever ties with one's home culture (i.e., cultural suicide) can have negative influences on students.

However, what are possible outcomes if students cannot assimilate to the dominant peer group? It is unlikely that students from non-dominant groups can integrate to the dominant peer group because of difficulties navigating cultural differences. The issue of integration with a dominant peer culture arose in Berger and Milem's (1999) study that found African-American students had a lower likelihood of persisting through college than White students. Findings from this study suggested that students who had values and norms that were most congruent with the values and norms of the dominant group culture on campus were more likely to persist through college. Conversely, students that were "least like the dominant peer group on campus, particularly with regard to race and political attitudes, were least likely to persist" (Berger and Milem 1999, p. 661). Although Berger and Milem's study is focused on domestic student experiences, the findings are relatable to international students because they too are not a part of the dominant peer group on college campuses.

Overall, integration is not ideal for framing student success and persistence for underrepresented students. Current research on success and persistence (e.g., Astin 1993; Tinto 1993) indicates a lack of attention to students from underrepresented groups, particularly international students. The challenge with using integration as the ultimate measure for student persistence is that "integration can mean something completely different to student groups who have been historically marginalized in higher education" (Hurtado and Carter 1997, p. 326). Furthermore, a few studies on persistence included international students among their participants. International students have to navigate a brand new culture within their new college campus, all while adjusting to their new outsider status as foreigners in the United States, which makes integration extremely challenging.

The concept of integration for international students is faulty for three reasons. First, the idea of a dominant

peer group wielding the highest level of influence is problematic, particularly when considering the cultural differences that exist between domestic students and international students. Tinto's (1993) theory assumes that international students must assimilate into the culture of the dominant group in order to be successful on campus. The suggestion of assimilation with the dominant culture can be problematic for international students who are very often seen as the "other" on college campuses. Tinto makes the assumption that students in the non-dominant culture can effectively and easily access and infiltrate the dominant cultural group, which may not be as accepting of others who do not fit the dominant groups' norms and attitudes (Kuh and Love 2000).

Second, according to Tinto's (1993) individualist idea of integration, international students must bear the principle burden of responsibility in their transition and integration to the college environment in the US. Thus, the burden of affiliation and integration is placed on the international students rather than sharing this responsibility with other members of the university. In other words, in order to integrate successfully, international students are the ones who must initiate the effort to conform. In this scenario, the institution bears little responsibility for adapting and responding to the needs of diverse student populations.

The third and most important reason for integration as a faulty concept stems from the fact that international students are temporary members of the US. Social integration is more difficult for international students, particularly those from non-Western countries, due to the differences in language and cultural practices. It would be difficult for international students to completely separate from their past and fully integrate when they are temporary visitors who may not be able to fully assimilate into the dominant culture. Additionally, the idea of full integration brings up the question of whether international students *should* fully integrate, and at what cost to their personal well-being?

The Case for Sense of Belonging

International students are not part of the dominant campus culture due to their different cultural backgrounds and temporary citizenship status. Rather than focusing on integration to the dominant culture, understanding international students' perceptions of membership in a foreign college community could provide insight on the non-dominant student group's feelings of transition to their campus community. In doing so, the emphasis shifts to highlighting the non-dominant group's invisible narrative rather than on the power of the dominant culture.

Feelings of belonging are a basic human need and often serve as motivation for positive behavior (Maslow 1954; Strayhorn 2012). The need to belong and to 'fit in' are a part of human desire to find connection and community with others. Sense of belonging is a concept based on the relational nature of individuals and groups. The need for belonging is particularly relevant for college students who are thrust into a foreign environment with strangers when they attend college.

When applying the construct of sense of belonging to a collegiate setting, sense of belonging is students' "psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community" (Hausmann et al. 2009, p. 650). College students' sense of belonging includes students' perceptions of institutional support and relationships with others, all of which combine to elicit feelings of connectedness and affiliation with the campus community. It is a "cognitive evaluation that typically leads to an affective response or behavior" (Strayhorn 2012, p. 3). The resulting feelings of belonging can positively influence students' academic achievement and persistence in college (Hausmann et al. 2007), particularly for students from underrepresented groups (Strayhorn 2012).

Sense of belonging has an association with academic success and motivation, indicating that the psychological aspect of student perception plays a role beyond just socialization. Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007) found that students' sense of belonging in their classrooms was associated with academic self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. Additionally, students' sense of

belonging at the university as a whole was strongly associated with their sense of social acceptance, implying that sense of belonging to the university is primarily influenced by social interactions and perception of acceptance by students' peers.

Peers play a critical role in students' sense of belonging because the emphasis is on interpersonal relations. Sense of belonging is a construct that falls within the idea of perceived cohesion, with an emphasis on the perception of group membership. Bollen and Hoyle (1990) described perceived cohesion as "an individual's sense of belonging to a particular group and his or her feelings of morale associated with membership in the group" (p. 482). Sense of belonging encompasses both cognitive and affective aspects. The cognitive level includes information about group experiences, and the affective level reflects the individual's appraisal of group interactions. The combination of both experiences and perceptions of interactions is likely a better predictor of international students' success and positive feelings towards their campus community, because sense of belonging measures feelings of membership in a community rather than measuring integration to a dominant culture, which is difficult for international students to achieve.

Implications for Practice and Research

Detailed implications for practice are difficult to present because each institution has its own unique culture and practices. Broadly, I recommend that institutions of higher education assess current practices that are intended to assist international students with their transition. Are the current practices culturally sensitive? Do they assume that international students should conform to current university practices, or do they help students understand the cultural and institutional foundations of these practices? Higher education institutions in the United States must examine the current climate on their campus, with an emphasis on understanding international student experiences. In doing so, institutions can understand the unique needs that international students have while living and learning in the United States. Also, institutions can disaggregate the data and information

based on country or region of origin for the students, allowing for a better understanding of the nuances related to diverse students' sense of belonging.

Another implication is to consider what exactly is encompassed in sense of belonging in students, especially for those from different cultural backgrounds. As currently defined in the US context, sense of belonging is an individualistic construct that requires self-reflection on one's interactions with other students. Some global cultures tend to be more collectivist in nature than how people in the US typically operate. For example, the cultural differences between Eastern and Western culture are most significant, notably in language, customs, and daily practices (Triandis 2009). Collectivist societies, such as Asian cultures, emphasize interdependence with others, use in-group norms to shape behavior, and view social relationships as a tightly woven community (Hui and Triandis 1986; Triandis 2009). In contrast, individualism is more common in Western culture, as typically found in the United States. Thus, the concept of sense of belonging may need to be adapted to be more inclusive of students who may not come from an individualistic background.

There are compelling reasons that suggest sense of belonging can be reconstructed, or potentially deconstructed, to be more applicable to international students. Perhaps a collective sense of belonging is a more appropriate measure for international students from collectivist societies. This would require measurement of international students' belonging to their individual identity group as a way to connect to the larger campus environment. That is, the idea of collective sense of belonging would focus on connections from individual to subgroup to large group rather than on the measurement of individual to large group connections. Several possibilities for reimagining and reconceptualizing sense of belonging for international students could be developed at individual institutions of higher education to better support overall student success and persistence. Rejecting the notion of integration would increase feelings of membership and sense of belonging in international students. As a result, sense of belonging can influence interna-

tional student success and persistence in a culturally inclusive way, which is lacking in Tinto's (1993) ideas of integration and the resultant cultural suicide.

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