

Internationalization Strategies in Chinese Higher Education: Balancing Global Integration and National Identity

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Abstract

China's higher education system has rapidly expanded and pursued vigorous internationalization since the late 20th century, aiming to enhance global competitiveness while preserving national identity. This study examines the strategies employed by Chinese universities to integrate into the global academic community and the measures taken to maintain China's cultural and ideological integrity. The analysis, grounded in policy review and literature, finds that Chinese higher education institutions have adopted a multifaceted approach: aggressively promoting outbound and inbound student mobility, forging international research collaborations, establishing joint programs and branch campuses, and implementing English-medium instruction to achieve global integration. Simultaneously, authorities emphasize national identity through curricula infused with Chinese culture and socialist values, tightened ideological oversight, and policies branding "internationalization with Chinese characteristics." The results reveal a dynamic balancing act – Chinese universities are largely pragmatic and eclectic in learning from Western models while adapting them to local contexts. The discussion highlights successes (e.g. improved world rankings, increased foreign enrollment) and tensions (e.g. balancing academic openness with ideological guidance, "brain drain" versus "brain gain") in this balancing process. The conclusion reflects on how China's global engagement in higher education can coexist with its desire to safeguard national sovereignty and cultural heritage. This study contributes to understanding the Chinese model of internationalization, offering insights for policymakers and academic leaders on managing the interplay between global forces and national priorities in higher education reform.

Keywords: Internationalization; Chinese Higher Education; Global Integration; National Identity; Education Policy; Cultural Identity

1. Introduction

Higher education internationalization is commonly defined as the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into teaching, research, and service functions of universities (Knight, 2004). Over the past four decades, China's higher education system – now one of the world's largest – has undergone dramatic internationalization as part of the nation's broader "reform and opening-up" policy initiated in 1978 (Huang, 2003; Yang, 2014). Chinese universities today actively pursue global engagement to enhance their academic quality and prestige, reflecting the worldwide trend of globalization in higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Mok, 2007). At the same time, the Chinese university leaders stress the importance of maintaining a strong national identity and socialist values within this internationalization process (Yang, 2010; Zhou, 2016). The interplay between global integration and national identity has therefore become a defining feature of China's higher education strategy.

In the decades following the launch of economic reforms, China prioritized higher education as a vehicle for national development and global competitiveness (State Council, 2010). Policies such as the "211 Project" and "985 Project" in the 1990s–2000s, and the more recent "Double First-Class" initiative, explicitly aim to cultivate world-class universities and research programs (Mohrman, 2008; Liu & Cheng, 2005). Internationalization has been a key means to this end – Chinese universities have been encouraged to adopt international curricular standards, publish in international journals, host and attend global conferences, and attract foreign talent (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Luo & Welch, 2021). By 2020, China was sending hundreds of thousands of students overseas annually and had become Asia's top destination for international students, reflecting deliberate policy efforts to increase academic mobility (Ministry of Education, 2016; Zha, Wu, & Hayhoe, 2019). These trends underscore China's integration into the global knowledge network and its ambition to be a leading higher education power.

Pursuing global integration raises questions about how Chinese higher education can simultaneously uphold national character, including language, culture, and political ideology (Tian & Lowe, 2014; Yang, 2014). Chinese leaders emphasize that universities must "remain socialist in orientation" even as they internationalize, guarding against what they perceive as undue Western influence or erosion of socialist ideals (Zhou, 2016). This balance between openness and safeguarding national interests represents a strategic dilemma: How can Chinese universities achieve world-class status and global integration without compromising the country's educational sovereignty and cultural identity?

Existing research offers insight into this dilemma. Knight (2012) categorizes rationales for internationalization (academic, economic, political, socio-cultural), all of which are evident in China's case: academically, China seeks improved quality and innovation; economically, skilled human capital and global reputation; politically, soft power and diplomatic influence; and socio-culturally, exposure to global ideas (Knight, 2012; Qiang, 2003). Studies also note the Chinese strong steering role in internationalization, ensuring that initiatives serve national goals (Yang, 2014; Shen & Wu, 2018). As a result, China's approach may differ from Western

paradigms – some scholars speak of “internationalization with Chinese characteristics,” wherein global best practices are adopted selectively and blended with indigenous elements. This article builds on such literature by examining the concrete strategies Chinese higher education employs to navigate the dual imperatives of global engagement and national identity preservation.

The aim of this study is to analyze how Chinese higher education institutions balance the drive for global integration with the mandate to uphold national identity. We review major internationalization strategies in Chinese universities and discuss their implementation against the backdrop of cultural and policy constraints. Section 2 outlines the methodology, including data sources and analytical approach. Section 3 presents results, categorizing key internationalization strategies and identity-preservation measures. Section 4 provides a discussion, interpreting the findings in light of theoretical and practical implications. Section 5 concludes with reflections on future prospects for Chinese higher education amid global and national forces. By elucidating China’s experience, this analysis can inform other countries and stakeholders interested in how higher education systems might globalize on their own terms.

2. Methodology

This article is based on a qualitative policy analysis and literature review. The research process involved two primary methods: document analysis of official policies and university strategies related to internationalization, and systematic literature review of scholarly studies on Chinese higher education internationalization.

2.1. Document Analysis Method

Key policy documents from the Chinese were examined to identify stated goals and regulations regarding internationalization. These included the Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020) (State Council, 2010), the Education Action Plan for the Belt and Road Initiative (Ministry of Education, 2016), and various directives on Sino-foreign cooperative universities, study-abroad scholarship programs, and curriculum guidelines. University-level strategic plans from a selection of leading Chinese universities (e.g., Peking University, Tsinghua University) were also reviewed to see how institutions interpret and implement internationalization goals. The document analysis focused on identifying recurring themes: initiatives to promote global integration (such as partnerships, international student recruitment, faculty exchanges) and mandates to reinforce national identity (such as ideological education requirements, use of Chinese language, cultural programs).

2.2. Literature Review Method

To contextualize and critique the policy intentions, a review of English and Chinese-language scholarly literature was conducted. We surveyed over 40 academic sources, including journal articles, books, and research reports, on topics such as the internationalization of Chinese higher education, comparative education policy, transnational education, and cultural/ideological aspects of education (Huang, 2003; Yang, 2014; Zha et al., 2019). Both qualitative studies (e.g., case

studies of specific universities or programs) and quantitative studies (e.g., enrollment statistics, ranking outcomes) were included to gain a comprehensive picture. Special attention was given to literature addressing the tension or interplay between global and local dimensions – for instance, works that discuss whether internationalization in China equals Westernization (Tian & Lowe, 2014), how China projects soft power through education (Pan, 2013; Yang, 2010), and how Chinese cultural/ideological elements are preserved in an era of globalization (Zhou, 2016).

This combined methodology is appropriate for the exploratory and interpretive nature of the research question. Rather than testing a hypothesis, the goal is to synthesize evidence from policy and practice to understand a complex phenomenon. The document analysis grounds the study in concrete measures and official stances, while the literature review provides multiple perspectives and critiques, helping to identify gaps between policy and implementation (“enactment gap”) noted by some scholars (Rizvi, 2011). No human subjects were involved, so ethical review was not required (thus sections on IRB and consent are not applicable). Instead, reliability was sought through triangulation of sources – corroborating findings across policy documents, statistical data, and independent academic analyses.

The analysis procedure was iterative. Policy documents were first coded for major themes (e.g., academic partnerships, curriculum internationalization, political education). Next, literature findings were mapped onto these themes to see how they reinforce or challenge the official narrative. For instance, if a policy touted increasing foreign student enrollment for cultural exchange, we checked enrollment data and studies on international student experiences in China (Wen & Hu, 2019) to assess outcomes and challenges. This approach allowed us to construct a layered understanding of each strategy: the intended goals, the practical implementation, and any tensions observed by researchers. The results (Section 3) are organized around the main clusters of strategies identified, each discussed with support from both policy evidence and scholarly research. While not a statistical analysis, this method provides depth and context, yielding insights into how and why Chinese higher education is attempting to balance global and national demands.

3. Results

3.1. Strategies for Global Integration

(1) International Student and Scholar Mobility

One of China’s foremost internationalization strategies is promoting mobility of students and scholars. China has massively expanded study-abroad programs for its citizens and concurrently developed schemes to attract foreign students to Chinese campuses. Outbound mobility is encouraged through government scholarships like the China Scholarship Council programs, which fund tens of thousands of Chinese students and academics to study or train abroad (Pan, 2011). This is driven by the belief that international experience will produce globally competent talent and foster knowledge transfer upon return (Qiang, 2003). At the same time, inbound mobility has surged – by the late 2010s China was hosting over 490,000 international students

annually, making it the third-largest host country globally (Ministry of Education, 2019). Policies such as Study in China 2020 set targets for recruiting foreign students, especially in science and engineering fields, and universities established international colleges to offer programs in English (Wen & Hu, 2019). This two-way flow is intended to integrate Chinese higher education into global academic networks and enhance cultural exchange. However, managing quality and integration for the growing international student body remains a challenge; researchers have noted issues such as language barriers, limited cross-cultural interaction on campuses, and a need for better support services (Wen & Hu, 2019; Wu & Zha, 2018).

(2) Transnational Partnerships and Branch Campuses

Chinese universities have actively pursued partnerships with foreign institutions as a fast track to global engagement. Since the 1990s, China enabled Sino-foreign cooperative education ventures, wherein domestic and overseas universities jointly establish programs or even independent joint campuses (Ministry of Education, 2016). Notable examples include University of Nottingham Ningbo China and NYU Shanghai – fully accredited universities in China operated in partnership with UK or US counterparts. By 2020, there were more than 2,300 joint programs or institutes in China (Wang & Zhou, 2015), ranging from dual-degree programs to extensive branch campuses. These partnerships bring international curricula, pedagogies, and faculty into Chinese settings, aiming to “internationalize at home” for those students who do not go abroad (Galloway et al., 2020). They also signal China’s openness and ability to collaborate within global higher education. The Chinese supports high-profile collaborations as a way to benchmark against world-class standards and to internationalize its talent pool (Yang, 2014; Shen & Wu, 2018). Nonetheless, managing these partnerships involves balancing differing educational cultures and expectations. Both sides must negotiate governance approaches to meet each partner’s standards while aligning with regulatory requirements.

(3) Curriculum Internationalization and EMI

Another strategy is the internationalization of curriculum and adoption of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Chinese universities. To prepare graduates for global careers and attract international students, many institutions have introduced English-taught degree programs, especially at the master’s and doctoral levels (Galloway et al., 2020). For example, leading universities now offer MBA programs, engineering courses, and even some undergraduate majors entirely in English. The use of English as a lingua franca in academia is seen as essential for integrating into global scholarly discourse and improving university rankings. Alongside EMI, universities are revising curricula to include more global content – such as courses on international law, global business, or comparative studies – and using internationally recognized textbooks and teaching materials (Huang, 2003; Knight, 2012). Faculty development programs encourage Chinese professors to improve their English proficiency and incorporate international perspectives in teaching (Luo & Welch, 2021). These efforts have yielded results: an increase in internationally co-authored publications and a growing presence of Chinese institutions in world university rankings indicate better global academic integration (Liu & Metcalfe, 2016; Shen & Li, 2015). However, researchers caution about the “Englishization” phenomenon – while EMI can

enhance competitiveness, it may also sideline the Chinese language in advanced education and pose learning difficulties for domestic students (Galloway et al., 2020). Some faculty and students report challenges in fully engaging with content in a non-native language, suggesting a need to balance English use with bilingual support to maintain teaching effectiveness.

(4) Research Collaboration and Talent Programs

China has invested heavily in global research collaboration as part of its internationalization toolkit. Top universities have established international joint research centers and laboratories with partners abroad, focusing on areas from nanotechnology to climate change. Participation in international research projects and consortia (e.g., CERN, large-scale STEM collaborations) has increased markedly (Liu & Metcalfe, 2016). Furthermore, national talent recruitment initiatives like the “Thousand Talents Plan” (launched in 2008) aggressively recruit foreign experts and overseas Chinese scholars to work in China’s universities and research institutes. These programs offer generous funding and prestigious appointments to attract global talent in support of China’s innovation drive. The inflow of returnee scholars (*haigui*) and foreign faculty has helped Chinese universities internationalize their research culture and PhD training, leading to a rise in high-impact publications (Luo & Welch, 2021). Collaborations are evident in the steady growth of internationally co-authored papers involving Chinese scientists, which reflects deeper integration into global knowledge production (Marginson, 2011; Shen & Wu, 2018). On the flip side, concerns about a “brain drain” – the loss of top Chinese students and scholars who remain abroad – have driven policies to incentivize returnees through grants, housing, and career opportunities (Qiang, 2003; Pan, 2011). Recent assessments suggest China is making progress in turning “brain drain” into “brain circulation” or even “brain gain,” as many Western-trained Chinese academics come back to take up roles in domestic universities (Chen & Huang, 2013). Nonetheless, integrating foreign faculty into Chinese campuses can pose cultural and institutional challenges, including language barriers and differences in administrative processes (Luo & Welch, 2021).

(5) Participation in Global Networks and Benchmarking

Chinese higher education’s global integration is also pursued through active participation in international consortia and adoption of global benchmarks. Many Chinese universities have joined international networks (such as the Association of Pacific Rim Universities, APRU, or the International Association of Universities) to share best practices and increase visibility. China hosts and attends major global higher education forums and uses these platforms to project a more international image of its universities (Yang, 2014). Additionally, global rankings and accreditation systems serve as yardsticks for Chinese institutions. The pursuit of AACSB or ABET accreditation for certain programs, for instance, has been used to signal quality by international standards. The Double First-Class initiative explicitly uses global rankings metrics and peer review to identify and fund elite institutions (Shen & Jiang, 2019). This benchmarking has spurred Chinese universities to emulate top global universities in governance and output (Liu & Cheng, 2005; Mohrman, 2008). While this can drive improvement, critics argue it also creates pressure to conform to Western criteria of excellence, potentially at the expense of attention to

local needs (Rizvi, 2011). China's policymakers appear aware of this and have called for "building world-class universities with Chinese characteristics," indicating a desire to not simply replicate Harvard or Oxford, but to develop globally competitive institutions rooted in Chinese context (Yang, 2014).

3.2. Measures to Preserve National Identity

Despite the strong push for internationalization, Chinese higher education has simultaneously implemented measures to reinforce national identity, ideology, and cultural heritage within the sector. These measures ensure that global engagement does not lead to what some in China fear as "Westernization" or loss of socialist orientation (Tian & Lowe, 2014; Yang, 2010).

(1) Ideological Education and Curriculum Content

A prominent feature of China's universities is the required curriculum in ideological and political theory. All students, including those in joint venture universities and foreign students studying in China, are generally expected to take courses on Marxism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (Zhou, 2016). The Ministry of Education mandates these courses to instill core socialist values and patriotic education. In recent years, these requirements have been strengthened rather than relaxed, indicating the state's commitment to ideological consistency even as campuses internationalize (Zhou, 2016; Yang, 2014). For example, new textbooks and online courses have been developed to make ideological content more appealing to youth, and top universities have Communist Party secretaries overseeing that teaching and research align with approved political values. Some joint programs initially struggled with how to incorporate these modules, but they have since complied by offering such classes (often in Chinese with translation for non-Chinese students) to fulfill national regulations. Scholars note that this intertwining of academia and ideology is a distinctive aspect of Chinese higher education; it is one way the system balances global academic norms with local political culture (Yang, 2010). While it sometimes clashes with Western notions of institutional autonomy, from the Chinese perspective it is seen as necessary to "guide the direction" of higher education and prevent the erosion of socialist ideals (Zhou, 2016).

(2) Chinese Language and Culture Promotion

To counterbalance the increased use of English and imported curricula, Chinese universities have taken steps to promote Chinese language and culture both at home and abroad. Domestically, even as EMI programs grow, institutions often require international students to learn Chinese language and encourage them to take courses in Chinese history or culture as part of their experience (Chen & Huang, 2013). The idea is to ensure foreigners engaging with China's academia also gain an appreciation of Chinese civilization and contemporary society, strengthening cultural exchange on China's terms. Internationally, China's well-known Confucius Institute initiative – while not a higher education program per se – exemplifies efforts to project Chinese culture and language globally as part of educational outreach (Pan, 2013). Confucius Institutes (CIs), which are often hosted on foreign university campuses, teach Chinese language and cultural subjects, and thus serve as a soft power tool complementing the international

activities of Chinese universities (Yang, 2010; Pan, 2013). By 2020, over 500 Confucius Institutes existed worldwide. Chinese universities often partner with CIs, sending teachers and materials abroad, which reinforces their international profile while promoting Chinese cultural heritage. This dual mission of the CIs (“global presence, national essence”) mirrors the balancing act at home – it is an assertion that China can engage globally without losing its cultural core. However, the CI program has faced differing perceptions in some host countries, reflecting the challenges of cultural outreach in diverse contexts (Pan, 2013). Nonetheless, it remains a pillar of China’s strategy to craft a positive national identity in the international educational sphere.

(3) Selective Adaptation of Foreign Models

In implementing internationalization initiatives, Chinese educators often practice selective adaptation, accepting aspects of foreign models that fit local values and rejecting those that conflict. For instance, Chinese universities have embraced Western pedagogy like interactive learning, but they still usually maintain a hierarchical professor-student relationship and exam-centric evaluation that align with domestic traditions (Huang, 2003). Similarly, while Western-style liberal arts education has influenced some reforms (a few elite universities created general education curricula inspired by U.S. colleges), these are tailored to include Chinese classics and moral education consistent with the national ethos (Li & Chen, 2005). University governance reforms offer another example: many institutions created boards of trustees and other structures seen in global practice, yet the Communist Party Committee remains the ultimate decision authority on campuses, ensuring alignment with national policy (Yang, 2014; Marginson, 2011). This dual structure – modern university administration alongside Party leadership – illustrates how China’s identity and political system are woven into the fabric of even the most “international” universities. Researchers describe this as a “hybrid model” of governance (Yang, 2014), one that keeps the university responsive to state and societal expectations in China while also allowing flexibility to interact with global partners. Such selective adaptation is supported by a narrative among Chinese officials that internationalization is not the same as Westernization: “We can internationalize and still do things the Chinese way” (Tian & Lowe, 2014). The extent to which this holds true is debated, but it is clear that deliberate choices are made to preserve elements of Chinese identity in campus life, governance, and academic norms.

(4) Regulatory Oversight and Academic Sovereignty

The Ministry of Education approves each Sino-foreign joint program or institution, requiring that a Chinese party holds academic control and that programs do not teach content violating Chinese law or policy (Ministry of Education, 2016). For example, subjects like law, politics, or history offered in joint ventures must adhere to approved curricula, and foreign textbooks undergo vetting for appropriateness. There have been instances where proposed joint programs were altered or halted due to concerns they might introduce undesirable ideologies (Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2016). This oversight ensures “education sovereignty” – China’s term for retaining ultimate control over educational content and values (Yang, 2014). In addition, foreign faculty hiring is subject to background checks, and international conferences in China often require permission to discuss sensitive topics. While such controls differ from the more

autonomously governed academic practices in Western academia, they reflect the priority placed on national stability and identity. China's leaders have explicitly stated that "universities are under the leadership of the Party" and must serve the socialist cause (Zhou, 2016). Therefore, even as universities gain greater autonomy in areas like international partnerships or financial management compared to the past, that autonomy has clear limits where national ideological security is concerned (Yang, 2010). The balance is delicate: policymakers aim to maintain strong oversight without discouraging international engagement. In recent years, China has strengthened governance measures to ensure that internationalization proceeds on its own terms (Marginson, 2011).

3.3. Balancing Outcomes and Challenges

The combined effect of the above strategies is a nuanced balance – Chinese higher education has undeniably become more global in its outlook and operations, yet it retains distinct characteristics rooted in national context. Outcomes of this balancing act include the rise of Chinese universities in global rankings and research output, indicating success in integration (Liu & Cheng, 2005; Shen & Li, 2015). Universities like Tsinghua and Peking University are now regularly listed among the world's top 50, thanks in part to international collaborations and talent recruitment. China also confers a growing number of degrees to international students and has become a hub for students from Asia and Africa, enhancing its soft power and cultural influence (Zha et al., 2019). Many Chinese universities have student bodies and faculty more international than ever before, creating more cosmopolitan campus environments than two decades ago (Luo & Welch, 2021). These are positive signs of global integration yielding tangible benefits.

However, challenges and tensions persist in balancing the dual goals. On the academic front, it is important to ensure that the drive for global rankings and prestige does not come at the expense of local educational needs and equity. Policymakers are aware that resources concentrated on elite international projects should not widen disparities between top-tier universities and less-funded local institutions, as educational equality is also a national priority.

Culturally, while China aims to avoid "Westernization," the widespread use of English and foreign frameworks could inadvertently overshadow Chinese scholarly discourse. For example, faculty hiring and promotion criteria sometimes emphasize publishing in English-language journals, which may undervalue research on local issues published in Chinese. There is also a personal dimension: Chinese students who study abroad may experience a cultural adjustment upon returning, which can pose reintegration challenges (Pan, 2011).

Moreover, geopolitical factors increasingly influence the balance. Geopolitical Shifts: Internationalization does not occur in isolation from world affairs. In the current global climate of rising nationalism and geopolitical tension, international academic engagement can face new constraints. Chinese universities may need to diversify their partnerships; for instance, if certain traditional avenues narrow, they can deepen ties with institutions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in line with the Belt and Road Initiative (Yang, 2010). Such diversification would make China's internationalization less West-centric and more broadly based. Maintaining mutual trust

and open communication will be important to ensure that academic collaboration continues smoothly. By continuing to uphold transparency and build confidence with global partners, China can remain firmly embedded in the international academic community.

Balancing Innovation and Ideology: Internally, a major ongoing challenge is fostering an environment of critical inquiry and innovation while under an ideology-focused framework. China's leadership places great importance on ideological guidance within universities. Some educators suggest that encouraging a culture of open inquiry and academic freedom can spur innovation and global impact, especially in fields like the social sciences and international relations. The challenge is to find a balance that allows intellectual creativity while upholding core values. One approach has been to encourage innovation in technical and applied fields, where political sensitivities are lower, while providing guidance in humanities and social sciences to ensure alignment with national objectives. This approach, already visible in practice, reflects a pragmatic strategy to foster excellence across disciplines. As global integration deepens and ideas circulate more freely, maintaining this balance will likely require continual adjustment.

4. Conclusion

China's experience in higher education internationalization underscores that globalization and national identity need not be mutually exclusive; rather, they can be dynamically balanced through deliberate policy and practice. This article has shown that Chinese universities, under strong state guidance, have adopted comprehensive global integration strategies – from mobilizing student flows and forging international partnerships to modernizing curricula and research – that have propelled them onto the world stage. Concurrently, a suite of measures aimed at preserving national identity – including ideological education, cultural promotion, selective adaptation of external models, and regulatory control – ensures that international engagement unfolds within the bounds of China's sociopolitical values. The result is a higher education system striving to be “globally competitive and distinctly Chinese” at the same time.

Several key conclusions emerge from this study. First, the pragmatic eclecticism of China's approach is evident: policymakers and university leaders are willing to learn from anywhere (be it the West or other Asian neighbors) if it benefits their development, but they also exhibit the confidence to modify or reject external ideas that clash with local priorities. This pragmatism has enabled rapid gains in capacity and quality – Chinese universities are increasingly publishing influential research, attracting international talent, and contributing to global knowledge networks. Second, the Chinese case highlights that state involvement and national ideology can be deeply intertwined with internationalization, contrary to theories that predict a weakening of national control in the face of globalization. In China, the state has not retreated; it has recalibrated its role to foster international links while simultaneously embedding a nationalist mission in higher education. This challenges the universality of certain Western assumptions about the evolution of universities, suggesting alternative pathways are viable.

However, the concluding analysis also notes ongoing tensions and uncertainties. The delicate balance China has maintained could be tested by internal and external pressures: rising geopolitical frictions, generational shifts in student attitudes, and the inherent creative ferment of global academia might all require adjustments in China's strategy. There is a recognition in China that true educational power comes not just from emulating others, but from contributing original ideas and models. Thus, a future aspiration is that China not only participates in internationalization but helps redefine it in a more multipolar, culturally inclusive manner. If China can reconcile its global ambitions with openness in intellectual inquiry – in short, if it can solve the riddle of how to be both fiercely Chinese and fully global – it may offer a blueprint for other countries navigating similar waters.

In closing, the story of internationalization in Chinese higher education is still being written. This study contributes a chapter by detailing the strategies and balancing acts up to the mid-2020s. For scholars and practitioners, China's case is a reminder that internationalization is not a neutral, technical process; it is deeply political and cultural. The "traffic" in international education is not one-way – China has shown it is not only receiving global influences but also shaping the global education landscape with its own ideas. Whether one views certain aspects critically or favorably, the scale and intentionality of China's efforts demand attention. As global higher education enters a new era of uncertainty and interconnectedness, understanding the Chinese approach enriches the dialogue on how universities can adapt to globalization while honoring their unique identity. It is a balancing act many will seek to master, and China's evolving model provides both inspiration and caution in that quest.

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