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## Article

# The financial strategies and approaches of Chinese government towards the internationalization of higher education in China

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# THE FINANCIAL STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES OF CHINESE GOVERNMENT TOWARDS THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHINA

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## Abstract

Approaches of internationalization of higher education (HE) have stimulated numerous countries to concurrently formulating innovative policies and strategies to make their higher educational institutions (HEIs) globally competitive. This has the aim to attract more international students and talents. In the view of this, many countries adopt different approaches to internationalize their HEIs. It is of this background the study has explored how the Chinese government's strategy and approaches boost up the attraction of international students to Chinese HE and to augment their internationalization practices. The study adopted qualitative research methodology, specifically employed interview and document analysis. Fifteen students were interviewed from three universities in Beijing. The study showed the role of the Chinese government and their strategies through scholarship provision and other programs to beef up the internationalization of Chinese HEIs. The study concluded by recommending that the HEIs should pay much attention to the quality education to international students not only been enthused with the quantitative nature of internationalization.

**Keywords:** internationalization, higher education, China, strategies, approaches.

**JEL Classification:** A2, H52, I23

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## **Introduction**

Higher education (HE) has currently moved towards a new trend of developmental stages due to the epoch of globalization coupled with technological advancement. These two forces (globalization and technological advancement) have revolutionized HE, thereby giving birth to “internationalization” of HE. Knight (2003, p. 2), defines internationalization of HE as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education”. Soderqvist (2002, p. 29) also added, “internationalization of higher education is a change process from a national higher education institution to an international higher education institution leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competences”. The overarching theme emerged from the two definitions above is “integrating international dimension in a local higher educational system” to improve upon the teaching, learning, research and management of higher educational institutions.

Many countries strive to enhance their higher educational systems by adopting strategic practices to augment their internationalization agenda. With the new trend of HE, China, which is notably known for its sustainable economic growth due to the influx of industrialization and escalation of international trade deals has concurrently adopted policies and strategies in the past decade to improve and internationalize its HEIs. Therefore, the current development in Chinese HE has gained tremendous attention from international students to further their education in China. On the other hand, the national agenda to achieve world-class universities and programs has attracted many foreign experts to teach, research and collaborate with Chinese HEIs and scholars. The Chinese government and HEIs have adopted strategic approaches toward enhancing their internationalization activities, thus making China one of the most popular places for higher educational destination for international students. It is on this background this study has explored the contributions of the Chinese government to enhance the internationalization of HE through its financial strategies to increase the number of international students and foreign faculty members. The central focus of this study is to explore how the Chinese government’s strategy and approaches boosts up the attraction of international students to Chinese HE through a qualitative approach.

## **1. Literature Review**

### **1.1 Definition of internationalization of higher education**

Internationalization is often confused with globalization (Altbach, 2004). However, there is an obvious interplay between internationalization and globalization. Altbach and Knight (2007, p. 290) define globalization as “the economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21st century higher education toward greater international involvement”. The forces of globalization have set an impetus on technological advancement, which has made events such as trade and education happening at local levels to be felt and participated by other countries. Internationalization of higher education emerged as a result of the forces of globalization. Knight (2003, p. 2) defined internationalization of HE as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education”. Soderqvist (2002, p. 29) added that internationalization of higher education is “a change process from a national higher

education institution to an international higher education institution leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competences". The internationalization of higher education involves setting up international branch campuses, research collaboration between HEIs globally, mobility of international students and professors, proliferation of exchange programs, competition for international talents, and institutionalizing international curriculum in the local universities (Khorsandi, 2014). De Wit (2002, p. 103) added that "multicultural education, intercultural education, cross-cultural education, education for international understanding, peace education, global education, transnational studies, and global studies" are all activities of internationalization of higher education in this globalization epoch. According to Delgado-Márquez et al (2011, p. 270), "one of the most widely used indicators for internationalization is the ratio of international students versus domestic students", they added, recent study shows that world-class universities have high score for this indicator. They quoted the study conducted by Horta (2009) that "when the student population of such universities is disaggregated by level of education, only 16% of the undergraduate student population consists of international students while, at graduate level, this percentage increases to 41%" (Delgado-Márquez et al 2011, p. 270). This phenomenon has caused increasing competition for international students in many top universities globally. Hence, from the above definitions, internationalization of HE can be encapsulated as academic collaboration between HEIs abroad, instilling of international practices in teaching, learning and management of HEIs, and mobility of foreign students and faculties. Therefore, the practices of many universities at the local level have been enhanced with the infusion of internationalization elements to compete globally with other universities abroad.

### **1.2 The Chinese government scholarship**

The Chinese government scholarship policy has become an impetus for attracting international students in the current decade. In 2008, China reformed its enrollment method by providing scholarships to international students and enhancing the quality of the Chinese government scholarship for international students. The Education Program for Studying in China further clarifies that it will gradually increase the number of government scholarships (Meng & Li, 2016). Such preferential policies will enable more excellent foreign students to apply for the government scholarships. The proliferation of the Chinese government scholarship for international students from the year 2004 to 2014 can demonstrate the attractiveness of government scholarships to foreign students (Meng & Li, 2016).

### **1.3 Types of Chinese scholarship**

In order to enhance exchanges and cooperation between China and the rest of the world, the Chinese government has established a series of scholarship programs to support students and scholars from all over the world to study, and conduct research in Chinese HEIs. The types of Chinese scholarships include Chinese government scholarships, provincial government scholarships, individual universities scholarships, corporate scholarships, Ministry of Commerce scholarship (MOFCOM), Confucius institute scholarship, Chinese Academy of Science (CAS), and the World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) President Scholarship (Gu & Cui, 2016).

The Chinese government scholarship is grouped into two categories; they are bilateral and non-bilateral categories (Gu & Cui, 2016). The Chinese government bilateral scholarship is

awarded to qualified applicants through their governments and the scholarship secretariat in their home countries, whereas applicants apply for the non-bilateral scholarship individually through the university they apply for in China. The Chinese government scholarship programs include: (1) Chinese government scholarships; (2) Chinese Government Great Wall Scholarships; (3) Excellent International Student Scholarships; (4) Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) Winner Scholarships; and (5) Chinese Culture Scholarships (Gu & Cui, 2016).

The Chinese government full scholarships include tuition fees, medical insurance, basic learning materials, accommodation, living expenses, one-time settlement subsidies. On the other hand, the partial scholarship only offers tuition fees for international students (Gu & Cui, 2016).

Currently, the Chinese government has three different standards for the funding of international students in China. The maximum number of undergraduate students is 66,200 yuan per year, the master's degree (general advanced students) is 79,200 yuan, and the doctoral degree (advanced students) is 99,800 yuan. (Ministry of Education, 2015).

In recent years, with the continuous expansion of the number of international students coming to China, the Chinese government's funding for foreign students has also increased year by year. In 2004, only 6,715 people were able to receive scholarships to study in China. By 2014, the number had increased to 36,943, an annual growth rate of nearly 18.6%. The number of international students who received government scholarships in 2014 also reached the highest level in history, as shown in Figure no. 1. (Meng & Li, 2016).

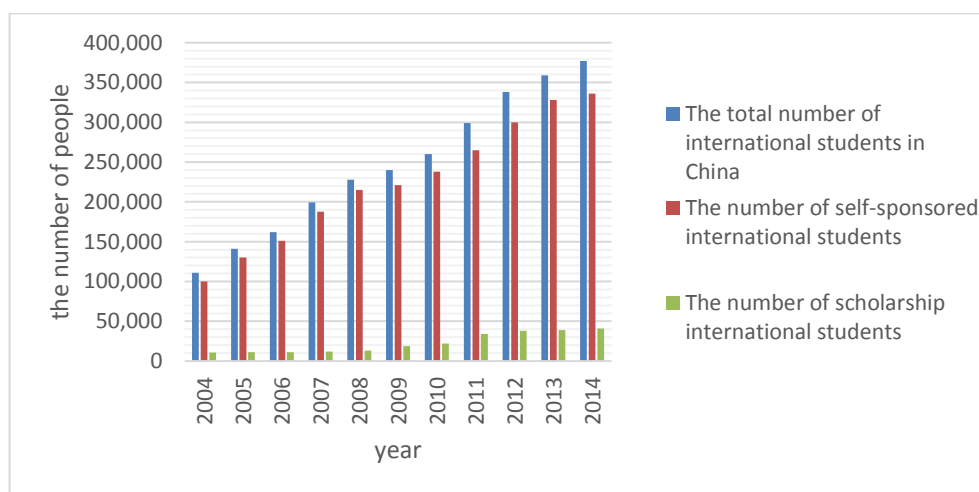


Figure no. 1: Statistics of international students studying in China in 2014.

Source: Ministry of Education (<http://www.moe.gov>.)

As shown in Figure 1, the number of foreign students coming to study in China has been on the rise from 2004 to 2014. The number of international students increased from 110,844 in 2004 to 377,054 in 2014, overall, the average annual growth rate for this decade is around 11%. In addition, the number of HEIs, and other educational institutions that received

international students in China increased significantly, from 420 in 2004 to 775 in 2014 (Meng & Li, 2016).

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education, in 2014, 36,943 international students gained Chinese government scholarships, accounting for 9.80% of the total number of international students in the same year; 340,111 foreign students were self-funded, accounting for 90.20% of the total number of international students coming to China in the same year (Ministry of Education, 2015).

From the level of international students, among the 377,054 international students who came to study in China in 2015, the number of students who were enrolled in academic education totalled 164,394, accounting for 43.60% of the total number; the total number of master's and doctoral students were 47,990, accounting for 29.2% (Ministry of Education, 2015). As of 2016, the number of foreign students studying in China exceeded 440,000, an increase of 35% over 2012. In particular, the number of international students along the "one Belt and one Road" countries has increased significantly, with a total of 207,746 people, an increase of 13.6% (Ding & Zhao, 2018).

In the past 6 years, the number of international students coming to China has increased rapidly with an average annual growth rate of 8.97%. In 2016, the number of international students exceeded over 440,000. The growth rate of international students has exceeded the expected target of 6.94% annual growth rate planned in the Study in China Program (Ministry of Education, 2015).

By 2015, the number of HEIs that recruit international students in China has reached 811, with 397,635 students from 202 countries and regions (Ministry of Education, 2015).

#### **1.4 International students along the "one Belt and one Road"**

From 2005 to 2015, the number of international students coming to China along the "Belt and Road" increased by 384.3% (Jiang & Wang, 2016). In March 2015, the Chinese Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce jointly issued the "Vision and Action for Promoting the Construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road", which clearly stated that it is necessary to expand the scale of international students and actively cooperate with foreign HEIs (Ding & Zhao, 2018). This has made it possible for China to provide 10,000 government scholarships each year to countries along the belt and road (Ding & Zhao, 2018). In July 2016, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the "Educational Action for Promoting the Construction of the Belt and Road", which clearly stated that China will further promote the opening and exchange of regional education, and strengthens education cooperation with the countries along the "one Belt and one Road" (Ding & Zhao, 2018). Again, the "one Belt and one Road" Provides capacity building, promotes collaborations, and building China into a destination of international students (Ding & Zhao, 2018).

In 2016, a total of 442,773 foreign students from 205 countries and regions studied in 829 HEIs in 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government, increasing from 45,138 students in 2015, the growth rate was 11.35% (the above data do not include Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan) (Chinese Central Network, 2017). Among them, 209,966 foreign students received academic education, accounting for 4.42% of the total number of international students in China, an increase of 25,167 people

compared with 2015, an increase of 13.62%; a total of 63,867 master's and doctoral students, an increase of 19.22% since 2015 (Chinese Central Network, 2017).

Scholarships have a certain exemplary role. The scholarship system is an important system for attracting international students in many countries. The number of international students from the countries in the "Belt and Road" gained Chinese government scholarships has increased by 76.4% (Jiang & Wang, 2016). For instance, in 2016, the Chinese government scholarship students along the "Belt and Road" accounted for 61%, an increase of 8.4% (Wang & Xie, 2017).

The availability of scholarships is one of the important factors for international students in the countries along the "Belt and Road" to consider studying in China. Therefore, the proportion of scholarship students in these countries is very high (Wang & Xie, 2017).

### **1.5 Chinese Government Scholarship – Silk Road**

On April 21, 2017, the Chinese Ministry of Education officially established the "Silk Road" Chinese Government Scholarship, which mainly supports the programs of universities and large domestic enterprises, universities and relevant ministries, universities and government departments or universities to jointly train talents, including undergraduate students, and graduate students (Ministry of Education, 2017).

The "Silk Road" Chinese Government Scholarship proposed by the Chinese Ministry of Education and the "Forbidden City Scholarship" set up by the Beijing Municipal Education Commission are used to fund international students from the Belt and Road countries to come to China to study or study in Beijing. The establishment of these Belt and Road Scholarships will help to train talents and outstanding skilled talents for the countries along the road, and further promote the "Belt and Road" agenda.

In the past five years, students from the countries along the "Belt and Road" have benefited from the Chinese government scholarships. By 2015, the number of international students funded by scholarships along the belt and road had accounted for more than 90% of the total number of international scholarships. On the contrary, the proportion of non-degree students who are funded by scholarships in the total number of international students is significantly reduced. It reflects to some extent that the proposed "One Belt, One Road" strategic concept in 2013 has proliferated the number of overseas students studying in China.

## **2. Local government scholarships**

### **2.1 Trial Measures for Shanghai Foreign Student Government Scholarship Application**

At the Shanghai Education Work Conference held in July 2004, the Shanghai Municipal Government regarded the development of international student education as an important aspect in the internationalization of Shanghai's integration education. It required all colleges and universities to increase the number of foreign students enrolled, and to improve the quality of teaching and training. The quantity and quality of international students' enrolment are one of the important indicators to measure the internationalization of the HEIs. Since 2005, the Shanghai Municipal Government has set up scholarships amounting

to 20 million yuan annually (Gu & Cui, 2016). According to this method, Shanghai foreign student with the government scholarships are divided into Class A, Class B and Class C. Category A accounts for 45% of the total scholarship, Class B accounts for approximately 45% of the total, and Category C accounts for approximately 10% of the total (50% for degree students and 50% for non-degree students) (Gu & Cui, 2016). Class A scholarships include tuition, accommodation, living expenses, and general medical insurance. Class B scholarships include tuition and general medical insurance. In addition, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission has also formulated the “Measures for the Administration of Shanghai Foreign Student Government Scholarships”. Since 2011, the amount of Class A scholarships has been increased from RMB 40,000 per person per year to RMB 47,200 (Gu & Cui, 2016).

On September 18, 2015, the Shanghai Municipal Finance Bureau and the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission jointly issued the “Notice on Further Improving the Government Scholarship Funding System for Foreign Students in Shanghai and Raising the Funding Standards”, which stipulates that the Shanghai Foreign Student Government Scholarship is mainly used to fund the following three aspects: (1) Excellent foreign students including students who receive advanced undergraduate, master's and doctoral degrees in Shanghai can gain scholarship from China. (2) Overseas study grants provided in accordance with educational agreements or memorandums of understanding signed by the municipal government with institutions such as good relationship cities, schools and international organizations. (3) Establishing a reward for outstanding graduates from Shanghai, and rewarding graduates with outstanding academic performance. There is a notice on further improving the government scholarship funding system for foreign students in Shanghai and improving the scholarship and supervision mechanism for international students (Gu & Cui, 2016).

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Qualitative Research

For the holistic description of this study, qualitative research method is employed to answer the research question, “how do the Chinese government’s financial strategies and policies enhance the internationalization activities of HE in China?” Qualitative research method is aimed to provide profound understanding about social phenomenon. As a constructionist will argue, individuals construct knowledge by their interaction with objects in the society or based on their personal experiences. The qualitative research will enable readers to understand how participants’ opinions, experiences, and beliefs form the bases of the reality of how their decisions were informed to further their education in China from the perspective of China’s financial scheme and their internationalization strategies.

Qualitative research method was employed because, first, it will give the participants the free room to use their own words to explain, and predict a social phenomenon, which prevents any imposition from the researchers or any third party. Second, it is rich and descriptive in nature because primary data, which is undistorted by the researchers is collated from the research participants. Finally, the researchers can listen attentively to the participants and probe them for more accuracy.



The data collection strategy of this study consists of document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The researchers employed interview due to the following reasons; first is the possibilities of collecting detailed information about research questions to critically analyse participant's thought, and attitudes towards China's strategies to improve their internationalization practices. Second, with interviews, the researcher had mastery over the primary data compilation procedure and was able to illuminate some matters during the procedure if necessary. Third, interview created a relaxed atmosphere in collecting data from participants. The interviewees felt more comfortable having a purposeful dialogue rather than filling out questionnaire. However, as compared to some primary data collection method, interview consumes more time and there are complexities in apportioning time for participants to conduct the interview.

The study participants involved fifteen international students from Africa, America, Asia and Europe studying in three different universities in Beijing. All the participants are awarded with different kinds of scholarships such as the Chinese Government Scholarship (CSC), Confucius scholarship, and MOFCOM scholarship. Some of participants study Chinese language and most of them pursue a comprehensive program in humanities, social sciences, and few others in natural science. Participation in this study was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed.

**Table no. 1: Basic information of interviewees**

Pseudonym	Gender	Nationality	Discipline	Scholarship	No. of years
Abby	F	American	Chinese Lang/culture	Confucius	1
Lucy	F	Italian	Chinese Lang/culture	Confucius	1
Patrick	M	Ghanaian	Education	Beijing gov.	2
Tiffany	F	British	Public Management	CSC	2
Emmanuel	M	Bahamas	MBA	MOFCOM	1
Eben	M	Ghanaian	Environmental Sci.	CSC	2
Dan	M	Pakistan	Chinese Lang/culture	Confucius	4
Silas	M	Pakistan	Environmental Sci.	CSC	2
Rita	F	American	Education	CSC	2
Beta	F	Korean	Chinese Lang/culture	Confucius	4
Isaac	M	Zimbabwe	Economics	CSC	2
Sherry	F	Mongolian	Chinese Lang/culture	Confucius	4
Tom	M	Indian	Chinese Lang/culture	Confucius	4
Mavis	F	Kenyan	Chinese Lang/culture	Confucius	4
Sam	M	Rwandan	Economics	CSC	2

On the other hand, documents were also analysed to find out several governmental strategies to beef up the internationalization agenda in Chinese HE. Documents were collected in both printed and electronic formats for analysis. Government documents and published articles about the financial policies and strategies of the Chinese government concerning Chinese higher educational internationalization activities were analysed, Data from interviewees and the documents were analysed by developing and applying codes. The researchers categorized all emerging ideas relevant to the study into themes.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Impetus of international students' mobility to China

There are several rationales for international student's mobility to China, Larbi and Fu (2017) found out that one of the major pull factors of international students to further their education in China is the provision of Chinese government scholarships. According to the literatures, there is proliferation of international students accessing HE in China annually. The scholarship provisions by the Chinese government influence the decisions of the increasing number of international students annually. Hence, the participants' responses denote scholarship awards as the primary stimulating effect to their mobility.

From Chinese perspective, China is very generous in their scholarship packages as compared to other developed countries. This is because China gives full scholarships including living stipends to many foreign students currently than many other countries. It was found that China organizes lots of training programs and workshops sponsored by the government for foreign experts to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Below are some of the participants' responses explaining how they were motivated to further their education in China.

*I was motivated to study Chinese Language and Culture to become a Chinese teacher in my country because I was fully funded. I was enrolled in the Confucius institutes in Kenyatta University where I got the Confucius scholarship for further studies in China (Mavis).*

Eben added that:

*I was nominated by my government through the ministry I was working in to be awarded the MOFCOM scholarship to further my studies in China. This is not my first time to China, in 2012, I was nominated in the same ministry to attend a training workshop in the area of wind energy technology.*

Eben's and Isaac's responses depict the relationship between China and their governments. Due to the diplomatic relationships that exist between China and other countries, China has offered many countries scholarship quota to be awarded to civil servants in governmental ministries for continuous studies. This is aimed towards developing the human resources in different countries under the framework of "south-south cooperation".

Subsequently, some of the participants expressed that they have one-year exchange program to advance their Chinese language proficiency in China. According to them, they study Chinese Language and Culture in the Confucius Institute in their home countries, based on their good performance, they were awarded scholarship to further their education in China.

Some of the respondents reiterated that their decision to further their education in China was doubtlessly influenced by the award of the Chinese government scholarship to provide financial assistance to further their study in China. Ahmed confirmed that master degree in Environmental Study in his country is expensive, therefore, he searched for scholarships abroad and applied for the Chinese government scholarship. According to Larbi and Fu (2017) one of the main push factors to influence students' decision to access HE abroad is the high cost of graduate programs in their home countries. Hence, Chinese government scholarship serves as an impetus to attract many foreign students to Chinese HE.

In addition, most of the HEIs provide internal scholarships awards and research grants to reward and motivate hardworking international students. Patrick stated that there is a yearly scholarship awarded by his university to international excellent students. He specified the categories of the yearly scholarship as, first and second prize award for PhD candidates, master's students and undergraduate students. We also found out that there is another scholarship named the "Ministry of Education excellent overseas students scholarship", which is purposed to encourage students to study and work hard. The amount involved in this scholarship is 18,000 yuan for undergraduate students and 30,000 yuan for graduate students (Beijing Normal University, 2016).

The Chinese government scholarship has benefited international students in several ways. Some of the participants responded that:

*The Chinese government scholarship is beneficial to both students and their families as it helps those from poor families who cannot afford HE to attain their desired level of education (Mavis).*

Another responded that:

*The Chinese government scholarship is beneficial because it provides opportunity for international students to enhance their knowledge and creativity to be able to go back to their home countries to make a positive contributions (Isaac).*

Most of the respondents added that studying in China has broadened their international perspectives and international social capital. It has given them the edge for global competition due to the knowledge they have acquired in Chinese HE. According to Lucy,

*I have met many international friends here in China, and I think I understand the world more than I did before. Initially, I felt nervous when coming to study in China alone because I knew no one here; however, meeting new people, both Chinese and foreigners has inculcated me into a new family with great opportunities.*

Another international student asserted,

*I have learnt new things and engaged in internships with great companies, therefore, I believe studying in China has given me the opportunity to compete globally for a better job (Sam).*

International students expressed profound benefits of the Chinese government scholarships, stating that students of any level (undergraduate and postgraduate), students of any status, been an employee, government official, entrepreneur and even students who are unemployed from any country have an opportunity to apply for any kind of the scholarship.

#### **4.2 The role of Chinese government in the internationalization of HE**

"Education is an important tool for the optimum development of a nation's human resources, which contributes largely to a nation's total economic growth", (Larbi, 2017, p. 38). There is a top-down approach of higher educational policies development and implementations in China. Hence, there are substantial roles the Chinese government plays to achieve the ultimate goal in HE, the creating of "world-class universities". First, the government makes national policies and design innovative strategies for the international development of Chinese HE. The local and international development of universities in China depends on the educational policy statement by the government, such as the

“National Program for Medium and Long Term Educational Reforms and Development 2010-2020 issued by the China’s State Council (2010)” (Li, 2016, p. 49). On the other hand, the HEIs have the autonomy to set up their own strategies and policies to enhance their qualities and their internationalization activities; however, they have to be in agreement with the nationwide policy (Li, 2016).

Second, the government has an indispensable responsibility as the main financier of the HEIs, the government provides funds through couple of projects such as the 211 and 985 projects (Ministry of Education, 2001). Both projects are explained thoroughly underneath. The government also funds international students by awarding them with full and partial scholarships to be enrolled in Chinese universities, besides, Chinese students and Chinese faculty members are also funded to be enrolled in universities abroad to further their education through the Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC) founded in 1996 under the Ministry of Education (Li, 2016).

Third, in the process of internationalization, “the Chinese government provides close direction, directing the institutions when, where, what and how to perform through its political power as well as economic resources” (Li, 2016, p. 50). Li (2016) further stated that the government’s intervention towards the internationalization of HE is seen as a manipulation of the higher institutions. However, most of the HEIs have autonomy to initiate some policies and strategies to expedite their internationalization process such as awarding internal scholarships to international students, hosting international conferences and seminars, nevertheless, they still operate within the national framework. The Chinese government has instituted several projects and strategies to achieve the world-class university status in China. Below are some of the projects instituted to ensure Chinese universities become world-class universities.

#### **4.3 Internationalizing Chinese Language and Culture through Confucius Institutes**

As China's economy and international cooperation is rapidly growing, there has also been a tremendous increase in the demand for the study of Chinese Language and Culture. Benefiting from the England, United States of America, France, Germany and Spain's experience in promoting their national languages, China started to explore through setting up non-profit public institutions, aimed to promoting Chinese language and culture in foreign countries in 2004: these institutes were named the Confucius Institute (Hanban, 2016).

Confucius Institute is a non-profit educational institution established by Sino-foreign cooperation, which commits to meet the needs of learning Chinese, enhancing appreciation of Chinese culture including the language for people around the world. It also strengthens the cultural and educational cooperation between China and the rest of the world, develops the friendly relations between China and other countries, promotes the development of multicultural environment, and builds a harmonious world.

Services provided by the Confucius institutes include teaching Chinese, training Chinese teachers, providing teaching and learning materials for Chinese language studies, carrying out Chinese level examination and certification of the Chinese language teachers, offering information consultation education of Chinese culture and education, and conducting foreign language and cultural exchange activities (Hanban, 2016). Through the Confucius Institutes globally, many international students majoring in Chinese Language and Culture

have gained full scholarships to further their studies in national universities in mainland China.

Since the world's first Confucius Institute established in Seoul (November 21, 2004), the Confucius Institutes have been through more than ten years of history. As at December, 2015, there have been 500 Confucius colleges in 125 countries, of which 32 of them are in 110 Asian countries, 46 in 32 African countries, 169 in 18 European countries, 157 in 18 American countries, and 18 in 3 Oceania countries (Hanban, 2016). Besides, there are 1000 Confucius classrooms in 72 countries, amongst which, 90 of them are in 18 Asian countries, 23 in 14 African countries, 257 in 28 countries in Europe, 544 in 8 countries in America, and 86 in 4 countries in Oceania (Hanban, 2016).

Confucius Institute as a new form of cross-border educational cooperation in the context of globalization, is the product of the times development and social needs (Zhao, 2014). Unlike the pattern of many Chinese universities engaged in the international educational exchange to attract foreign students, Confucius Institute is in a "go out" approach to actively participate in educational competition and cooperation at the international level.

Hu, (2011) found that the Confucius Institute was a good way to promote the influence and national image of China by investigating a summer class named Startalk in UMass Boston and Bryant University. Startalk is a part of the program of National Security Language Initiative, which funded by the Federal government to promote the foreign language learning in 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade, including Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Persian, Swahili, Turkish, and Urdu. The teaching activities of Startalk are organized by Confucius Institute. After the Startalk, the students had a deeper understanding of China; accept the Chinese culture and have more positive image of China. (Hu, 2011)

#### **4.4 One Belt and One Road Policy and its influence on internationalization of Chinese HE**

In May 2016, the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China announced the China's "One Belt and One Road" plan, introducing its background, the principle, the policy framework, cooperative pivot, cooperation mechanism, and the status of openness in all parts of the country to create a better future together. The One Belt One Road policy has had a positive impact to augment the number of international students in China. For instance, in 2017, there were 317,200 international students from countries within the "one belt one road", which is 64.85% of the total number of students. (Ministry of Education, 2017)

#### **4.5 Framework of the "One Belt and One Road"**

"One Belt and One Road" is to develop and realize the common prosperity of win-win cooperation, enhance understanding and trust of countries, strengthening peace and friendship between countries. The Chinese government initiative grasps peaceful collaboration, open inclusiveness, mutual educational exchange, mutual advantages and win-win concept. Again, the "One Belt and One Road" policy is to promote cooperation in all aspects, and build political mutual trust, economic integration, and cultural interests of countries.

#### 4.6 Strategies to Move Forward in HE with the One Belt and One Road Plan

The countries along the belt and road are characterized by distinctive features such as, rich resources, and cooperation. China has designed supportive measures, leading to the six aspects for the suggested framework; cooperation, mutual learning and advanced education experience, collaborating with high quality education resources, promote national education development in and all-round way, carry out the education connectivity cooperation and strengthen the education policy communication.

"One Belt and One Road" education policies is to aid collaborative research, build information exchange mechanism along the national education policy, recommendations to promote education policy, and social forces to carry out education for the countries along the school cooperation and exchange policy advice (MOE, 2016). Positive sign of bilateral, multilateral and sub-regional education cooperation framework agreement is to set along the national education cooperation and exchange, and realization of mutual recognition of credits, to together promote the education community building (MOE, 2016). Again, this program is to help the education cooperation channel, advance between countries' visa facilitation, expanding areas of education cooperation and exchange, active frequent exchanges and cooperation, communication and development. The "One Belt and One Road" academic exchange platform has been created to attract experts and scholars from various countries to carry out research (MOE, 2016).

### 5. The rationale of the Chinese government support to international students

#### 5.1 Policy promotion

The Ministry of Education of China issued the "Study Program for Studying in China" in September 2010, clearly pointing out that studying in China plays an important role in building a world-class university and promoting internationalization of HE in China, and cultivating China's soft power. China government has proposed to promote world-class universities and world-class discipline construction programs, and recruiting more international students has effectively promoted the internationalization of HE agenda. China's higher education has entered the stage of mass education from elite education. The government has formulated relevant policies to provide financial resources for supporting colleges and universities to create world-class universities. To build the world-class universities, the higher institutions must be opened to international students.

The "one Belt and one Road" policy about study abroad education closely matches the goal of "creating a world-class university" in the field of higher education in China, and has created a good development opportunity for promoting the internationalization of higher education in China. (Luan &Sun, 2018)

#### 5.2 Competitive environment of internationalization

The global international student mobility has expanded rapidly, and various countries have begun to compete for international students based on public diplomacy, talent reserve, and economic dividends (Geddie, 2015). The policy of recruiting foreign students by universities has made it possible to achieve international attractiveness. The social and economic benefits brought by foreign students have stimulated colleges and universities, which serves as an impetus to domestic university expansion to promote the recruitment of

international students. In the sphere of internationalization of HE, the proliferation of foreign students has become an important indicator for evaluating the internationalization of universities (Wang & Xie, 2017).

### **5.3 Benefits of carrying out internationalization activities**

With the improvement of the internationalization level of HE, the recruitment of foreign teachers has proliferated (Wang, 2001). They not only bring international language, but also inculcate international dimensions in the delivery of HE (Knight, 2004). The foreign faculty members help to introduce advance teaching concepts, teaching methods, teaching content and classroom management, which contribute to the advancement of internationalization of higher education (Cao, 2006). An advanced higher educational system includes but not limited to an international curriculum system, contemporary teaching materials, educational software, and innovative human resources (teachers) (Cao, 2006). Hence, the improvement of internationalization practices in Chinese HE correspondingly realize the efficiency of the dimensions of determinants of advanced HE. On the one hand, internationalization of Chinese HE provides opportunities for local Chinese students to access HE abroad, and to be abreast with international affairs and current happenings globally.

Students from China along the “Belt and Road” countries are the source of talents and solve the shortage talent problem (brain gain) from the source (Zhang & Wen, 2018). The recruitment of self-financed international students is one of the income-generating channels of colleges and universities (Wang, 2001). For foreign language colleges and universities, the role of international student education and enrollment work is particularly evident in the construction of multilingual disciplines and the creation of campus foreign language environments.

The dissemination of Chinese values and Chinese culture, as well as the promotion of mutual understanding and cultural exchanges between countries and regions have irreplaceable practical significance (Zhang & Wen, 2018). The proportion of international students is not only an important indicator of the internationalization of a city and a region, but also a direction for the economic development of this city and region. The number of international students is an important indicator of the degree of internationalization of a country (Zhang & Wen, 2018). HE in developed countries attaches great importance to the development of international students’ education and uses various means to increase the number of international students (Zhang & Wen, 2018).

### **5.4 Challenges encountered by HEIs in the process of their internationalization**

China embarked on their internationalization process about a decade ago, therefore, there are numerous challenges faced by the HEIs in carrying out their internationalization practices. First, since the Chinese approach to internationalization is top-down approach, the central government sets policies and provides the HEIs with funds to implement those policies. The universities have to stick around the national policies to enhance their internationalization activities. However, we argue that some of the policies and projects are not in the capacity of some of the universities to successfully implement and carry out the necessary actions; therefore, the challenges they encounter limit them from achieving the set targets. For instance, some of the universities lack the human resources (foreign expertise) to adequately structure and run the English-taught programs in their universities, hence, the international students who are enrolled in such programs face the dilemma of

switching to Chinese-taught program or the university. In addition, some of the universities are not able to diversify their institutional system and structures to suit the need of international students and foreign faculty members, such as the curriculum, institutional and faculty websites, universities electronic library system and notice of international conferences and workshops.

Again, in the act of pursuance of the Chinese internationalization activities, there is much focus on the mobility of students, recruitment of foreign faculty members, and exchange programs to measure the growth of the universities in the internationalization realm. Nevertheless, we suggest that for internationalization to be holistically achieved, the internal factors must be strengthened. We add that internationalization involves strengthening the internal factors, institutional culture and modernizing the institutional curriculum, practices and systems with experiences of leading universities globally to fit into international demands to appeal students, and on the other hand, externalizing universities' values and products to epitomize internationalization values and practices. We argue that internationalization is not only measured by quantifying the number of international students and faculty members coming in annually or the number of international alliances an institution has, but it is also the quality of educational and social values inculcated in the international students that have high demand globally. It is also a lifelong activity that based on the quality of academic and social values inculcated in students evolves to have a global positive impart. This enables universities to acquire goodwill and enhance their international reputation. Nevertheless, according to most of the international students interviewed especially those offering postgraduate programs do not pass through the process to build their potentials in practical academic activities such as research, teaching opportunities (for PhD students), academic presentations and other research opportunities. This is a limitation to the extent at which international students would express the goodwill of their universities when they graduate and go back to their home countries.

### **Conclusion**

The Chinese Government's scholarship awards to international students undoubtedly attract many international students, which has caused a profound increase in the number of foreign students in China. The motive that predominated international students' decision to study in China is the award of the Chinese Government Scholarship. The proliferation of the Chinese government scholarships and its categorization to some extent has augmented the inflow of international students from all over the world. The current policy "One Belt One Road" initiated by the Chinese government has also contributed to the increment of the scholarship quota in many countries within the policy. Recruiting international students is part of the internationalization process of HEIs of which policy makers and state governments adopt to achieve the goal of internationalization (Li & Bray, 2007). As a result, the Chinese government adopts different strategies each year to increase the scholarship quota for international students to study in China because China clearly recognized the recruitment of international students as an important part of the process of internationalizing its higher educational institutions (Jiani, 2016).

Due to the strategies employed by the Chinese government to create world-class universities globally, China has become one of the popular study destinations for



international students. The Education Ministry reported on its website that a total of 377,054 international students from 203 countries and regions studied on the Chinese mainland in 2014, an increase of 5.77%, that is 20,555 students compared to 2013 (Ministry of Education, 2015). As shown in the figures above, the increasing number of international students signifies the efficiency of the Chinese policies and strategies regarding internationalization as far as mobility on students is concerned. Attention should be paid on the transfer from focusing on indigenous students to international environment and to foreign promotion in order for China to enhance its internationalization agenda. With regard to this, the Ministry of Education has set a target of recruiting 500,000 international students by 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2016); however, many obstacles will have to be overcome before that goal is achieved.

Knight (2004, p. 23) asserted, "The international mobility of students and academics as well as collaborative research and education initiatives are being seen as productive ways to develop closer geopolitical ties and economic relationships". China seeks to develop their geopolitical ties and economic relationships with many countries, hence, enhancing its internationalization activities such as awarding international students with scholarships, research collaboration with renowned international universities, international exchange programs, hosting of conferences, and academic workshops and forums will strengthen China's international relation with other countries. In order to enhance the China's one belt one road policy to improve their economic and geopolitical relation, member countries have been given more scholarship quota to enhance the inflow of students from such countries to China to strengthen their ties.

The persistence of these trends of strategic enhancement of internationalization of HE by the Chinese government would continue to elevate some of the Chinese HEIs and programs higher on the global ranking of universities and programs, which will help to appeal many international students and scholars.

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