

Learning Citizenship Values in Chinese Universities: A Role for International Students in Promoting Chinese Values Globally

With the rapid internationalisation of higher education, young people's experiences of transnational mobility are increasing. The potential effects of this type of mobility on citizenship formation are underexplored, especially in the Chinese context. This proposed study will address the topic of citizenship in the context of Chinese universities' aspirations for regional and global reach. China has become Asia's most popular destination for international university students and the third most popular in the world. International students have traditionally been exempted from all of the political education courses that are compulsory for their local Chinese peers. However, this practice was changed by a new policy directive issued by the Chinese central government in 2018, which emphasised the political and diplomatic role of transnational education in Chinese universities. International students are now expected to deepen their understanding of Chinese society and values and to play a future role in bridging the gap between China and the rest of the world. How such a curriculum should be developed remains a matter of national debate, and how it is received by international students is an important question.

Research has shown that international students may experience language barriers and cultural challenges when adapting to university life in China, but little research has been devoted to exploring their learning experiences and citizenship values in this context. Very limited empirical evidence has been collected, either within or outside China. We will examine citizenship education in transnational contexts and explore the complexity of citizenship formation as mobility increases, based on the Chinese experience.

To explore the Chinese approach to developing transnational citizenship education, we will collect empirical data from both university staff and international students in China's three main geographical regions. The field sites differ significantly in terms of geographic location, political environment, level of socio-economic development, local culture, and the degree of higher education development. The three sites attract international students from various countries and socio-cultural backgrounds and provide them with different higher education learning experiences in China. Based on first-hand data, our study will provide new insights into approaches to citizenship learning for transnational young people, which is becoming an important research focus in national and global contexts. Our study will also contribute to policy developments and curriculum construction regarding international students in China's higher education.