



By: *Catriona M. Munro, TA Editor in Chief*

# Chinese Whispers: Western "educational investment" in China



## UK education in China

A British friend recently expressed his concern about how his children's public school has established an "educational exchange programme" by setting up a school based on its educational principles and ethos in Shanghai, China. [A "public" or "private" school in the UK means that the pupils' parents pay annual fees for their children's education, and are considered to cater for elites]. The school is financed principally by the Chinese government. And it is not alone. Several prestigious British public schools have long established clones in China. "Transfer education into South Korea or India or Brazil", he complained. "Not autocratic China". Another friend, who works for the British higher education establishment, put it more succinctly: "it's all about the money, the money, the money". I accept that education has been monetised dramatically since it was the preserve of the exam-passing elite, and that children learn at varying speeds. A university degree is now almost mandatory in the West in order to enjoy a fulfilling career, which explains in part how, in tandem with cracking down on immigration, we are not getting fruit and vegetables out of the ground. But that is by the by. My research has yielded unsurprising results. Most of the Western "educational investors" are Western universities. And most of them seem to be singing from the same hymn sheet: "a pathway to obtain baseline academic credentials in the absence of other opportunities for progress in the Chinese educational system"; "children of China's 'new rich' entrepreneurial class...have economic resources but occupied precarious social positions in contemporary Chinese society"; "in terms of China's investment in public education resources in recent years [2018], there is a huge gap compared with developed countries and even the international average level", wrote a Canadian academic, more or less emulated by every other academic employed to pay lip service to the achievements of international educational exchange.

## US education in China

The US has been involved in educational transfers with China since the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt. There is an "American Harvard": Tsinghua University in Beijing, which is fully funded by the Chinese Ministry of Education. Notable graduates include current Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who graduated in chemical engineering, and former leader Hu Jintao, who graduated in hydraulic engineering. An American academic lauds the export of a counterweight to "creativities challenges and possibilities within an authoritarian regime that prizes control and conformity". I cannot find any evidence that either Xi or Hu left the University to join the Red Guards during their tenure, when the Cultural Revolution was in full swing, and their faculty was shut down, as the students became "impossible to teach".

## French education in China

French educational "investment" has now boarded the apple cart, and set up a partnership with Renmin University, teaching business degrees in Suzhou. In addition, it has launched a new "collaboration" with Shanghai Jiao Tong University involving new business degrees in "cultural and creative industries", by which they mean "tech hubs" - there are already 100 French start-ups to export French know-how in China. A specific example is an IFC (Sino-French Institutes) funded by the French state to create links with a consortium of French aeronautics including links with the French Airbus industry. Quoi?

## Australian education in China

Australia, with significant geographical ties with China, embraces a "Learning Management Systems" (LMS) approach, which aim to define how values in the workplace are influenced by culture within Chinese institutions. These "dimensions" include "Power Distance", "Individualism versus Collectivism" and "Masculinity versus

Femininity". I wish them luck.

## German educational influence in China

Germany, known for its focus on vocational education and training, has launched projects in China which aim to export its international benchmark.

## Who is really benefiting from all this cultural and educational investment?

It is quite clear that the Chinese yuan and technology transfers are the main benefactors. And who can blame the educational institutions in the West that have been forced to become fundraisers with a new focus on finance in a competitive, Capitalist environment, where education is a vital commodity? China remains autocratic, repressive of any form of free speech and essentially impenetrable. Are there any tangible consequences in China of the Western injections of freedom and equality and opportunities regardless of social and political status? We are talking about one of the few countries in the world, and the most populous, that fails to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the basis of a tenuous ideological relationship and itself harbours imperialist aims.

## What happened to “educational exchange” for the UK post-Brexit?

As a footnote, here is a list of what Brexit has caused the UK to withdraw from a series of European projects, not in an autocracy, but on our democratic doorstep:

- London hosted the European Banking Agency. The EBA has now moved to Paris;
- The UK has left the Horizon Project (charts emerging technologies and trends and their impact on higher education and information security);
- The UK has left the ITER Project (an international project on fusion energy to harness non-carbon global energy supply);
- The UK has left the Copernicus Project (the EU's Earth Observation project, used for service providers and public authorities to improve the lives of EU citizens);
- The Euratom project (part of the EU's efforts to promote technical leadership in nuclear research and innovation focusing on safety and security).

Source: UK House of Commons Library. As usual, a question of economic priorities.

- London hosted the European Medical Agency. The EMA It has now moved its headquarters to Amsterdam;