Articulating transboundary education: Growing IJCE to cultivate innovation frontiers

Hamish Coates \(^1\), Juan Zhang, Wen Wen, Juan Yang, and Jinghuan Shi

Into a transboundary world

Pandemic-related changes have revealed the transboundary nature of education. Education institutions have long sought to influence everything in the universe, from nanoparticles, to socioeconomic affairs, to far-away galaxies. In recent years it has become clear how much the rest of the world also shapes education.

This carries huge consequences for how we understand, design and deliver education. Matters external to the ‘education sector’ become preconditions and determinants rather than mere recipients or derivatives. This means that social issues define education and research ventures, a much broader array of stakeholders participate in education and academic work, and the appraisal of education value draws from beyond an elite group of peers. Education is not valued all or only by money or credentialling, but by the value it generates for different people and communities.

Such a shift to transboundary education (TBE) carries huge implications for the substance of education, and for how people move around the world to teach, learn and do research. Simply put, as Nicol and Bice convey in their recent IJCE article, TBE means moving beyond all different kinds of prevailing boundaries. It goes beyond existing academic partnerships. TBE invokes cross-crossing pathways, new accessibilities, industries, modalities, partnerships, communities and standards. It makes the task of education and other academic work much more complicated yet also inspiring, giving fresh impetus and placing new demands on research and analysis.

Internationally, TBE bursts beyond all kinds of boundaries well worn by established forms of transnational education (TNE). TNE, in its broadest sense or instantiation, involves the provision of education to students in or from another country. While TNE has many and varied permutations, it typically involves one or more kinds of border- or passport-crossing/hopping. TBE can involve such venturing, but also engagements beyond the education sector, expanded topics, new sources of value and funding, and ramped-up demands for greater social returns from education.
Online or hybrid teaching and learning open up a new field for transboundary education, as it they do for many other forms of liaison and engagement.

This is not to suggest that moving people around the world via various trans-national arrangements is in decline or unimportant. Indeed, the pandemic has revealed the enormous wealth unleashed from bringing people from different backgrounds and experiences together. Pandemic-derived travel restrictions revealed the capacity and also limit of online and hybrid forms of education. Only so much can be done and achieved with computer screens. Even when the pandemic subsides, and compounding international issues settle, most people would seem to value the resumption of more casual forms of interpersonal contact. In other words, TBE seems to embrace TNE.

The International Journal of Chinese Education (IJCE) provides an open global forum for discussion of such broad-ranging and imaginative issues. Since 2012, IJCE has published high-quality papers on a vast array of topics relevant to education in China and beyond. The 2021 shift from being a prestigious and small-scale paper-based journal to being a diamond/platinum free open access journal has set IJCE on a course which is resoundingly aligned with the larger vibes which reverberate around TBE. Indeed, this shift is in synch with the unfolding global era given the shifts towards ‘openness’ by major research ecosystems in Europe, the United States and Asia. China, for instance, is working on a national strategy for the internationalisation of its domestic journals an open science strategy.

**A picture of 2022 so far**

IJCE is growing soundly, and swiftly. Between 2012 and 2020, the 126 published IJCE articles were downloaded 696 times altogether. The 175 IJCE articles are now downloaded around 7,000 times each month, and growing, and likely more than 50,000 times overall since going diamond open access at the start of 2021. A greater volume of papers is being submitted, a sign of attention and engagement, though given constraints around publication volumes it does mean that the acceptance rate must fall. Pleasingly, this growth has cultivated a vibrant review culture by senior and emerging scholars in China and around the world. As IJCE Editors we are enormously grateful to everyone who contributes an expert review. The editorial team will also grow to ensure a rapid turnaround time of around a month.

Taking a snapshot of 2022 papers reveals the quality and depth of scholarship being published. 10 articles were published between January and April (Aatif, 2022; Cui et al., 2022; Kazuyuki, 2022; Li and Longpradit, 2022; Nicol and Bice, 2022; Sung et al., 2022; Zhang, 2022; Zhao and Ebanda de B’beri, 2022; Zheng, 2022). Following a growing pattern, these articles were submitted to IJCE from researchers and authors without prior attachment to IJCE, IOE or Tsinghua. IJCE’s reputation and prestige starts to shine more than ever before as a platform for discussing a whole host of boundary-crossing education issues.

Mohammed Aatif examines whether Arab learners are interactively or instrumentally motivated to learn Chinese as a foreign language in China. While the world is replete with articles about Chinese/English exchange and study, this paper presents an excellent example of new transboundary forms of engagement engaging Arabic and Chinese cultures. Limited studies have focused on the Arab learners studying Chinese language in China.

Touching another emerging element of TBE, You Zhang from the University of Toronto draws on a quantitative survey of Chinese university students to explore the strengths and more importantly the limitations of the current research of Internationalization at Home (IaH) in relation to equity from both institutional and systemic perspectives. This paper is important as most previous studies on IaH tend to focus on students at a single institution in the Western context, rarely has the literature considered the characteristics of higher education systems to understand how systematic
issues affect the intended objective of IaH benefiting all students. IaH is a concept and practice which is much better understood and advanced within TBE than TNE parameters. If a student pursues ‘international study’ while staying in their ‘home country’, what does this mean? Instrumentally, they may achieve a qualification from a foreign institution. But what about cultural exposure, the development of intercultural skills, tolerance of difference, or authenticity of the engagement? Can IaH unfold in certain ‘global’ places around the world, or in many and different ways?

IJCE embraces education in the broadest sense, not just higher education. With this in mind, Bo Cui, Faye McCallum and Mathew White focus on the wellbeing of rural Chinese teachers in China. The authors emphasize the positive elements of rurality that strengthen teachers’ wellbeing. They unpack five unique profiles that support teacher wellbeing. In a related paper, the authors argue that teacher wellbeing plays a crucial role in teacher hence education quality. Working within the Chinese context, such analyses bring out intersections between education, rurality, and teaching. Rural education in China and in particular teacher remains a significant hurdle for development. These papers explore pathways between these ideas.

Stephanie Nicol and Sara Bice explore the case of Tsinghua University’s unprecedented shift to online learning as a means of investigating transboundary crisis response in a major public institution. Here, the concept ‘transboundary’ refers to the way in which leaders and experts and stakeholders are jolted to work in new and unusual ways. Given the way the world spins, Tsinghua was the first major global university to shift from ‘normal’ into ‘pandemic/online’ mode. This paper explores how leadership is most tested when things go awry and unpacks the case study to explore the reification and dissolution hence nature of boundaries when they are most being tested.

In another paper, Xin Li adopted a sequential exploratory mixed-method design to explore whether experiential learning can improve international students’ intercultural sensitivity through cross-cultural management of international students. Yet again, a boundary-crossing investigation. Likewise, Johnny Sung, Yee Zher Sheng, Albert K Liau, Aggie Xinhui, Liu Liu and Hamish Coates articulate a framework to help higher education institutions engage in lifelong learning. Maeda Kazuyuki from Hiroshima University adopted the theory of intergroup conflict within organizations. Sebastian Zhao and Boulo Ebanda de B’beri analysed the acculturation of Chinese international students in Canada, emphasizing students’ post-graduation settlement in China, Canada, or in other countries. Finally, one book review was published alongside the research articles, in which Gaoming Zheng systematically reviewed the book titled ‘Research Handbook on Academic Careers and Managing Academics’.

Each in their own way, all of these are transboundary papers. All the papers cross ideas, theories, places, practices, policies, or potentialities. Such juxtapositions reveal contradictions, tensions, evidence, theories and projections which cast unexpected hence value-adding light on education. As the IJCE aims and scope make clear, “significant originality is encouraged”.

Seven research papers and one book review have been published since May, with several more in process to top off the May-August compilation (Chen, 2022; Ge et al., 2022; Huang, 2022; Lin and Dai, 2022; Mao et al., 2022; Peng, 2022; Xie, 2022; Zhang, 2022). Julie Yu-Wen Chen investigate implementation of the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) and its Home Edition during the Covid-19 Pandemic, crossing boundaries between language and cultures. Shigang Ge, Chin Hai Leng, and Siti Mastura Baharudin explore the effect of multimedia principles on students’ attitude and retention towards Japanese vocabulary among 10-grade students in Chinese rural areas. Qing Xie report on a two-stage survey with a sample of 145 English major students in China as they explore English majors’ business English communication learning needs, the effectiveness of the task-based approach, and the potential short-term and long-term learning outcomes. Xi Lin and Yan Dai focus on the relationship between online learning readiness (OLR) and self-regulated learning (SRL), drawing insights from an online survey with a sample of 206 students from a
single university in North China. Xue Zhang, Yue Huang, and Ying Liu explore language tasks that English as a foreign language (EFL) college students and teachers prefer within their language classrooms, and they identify common conditions underlying these tasks that could facilitate learner engagement. This study builds a clear picture of task engagement in language learning and provided important contributions to the enhancement of learner engagement at language task level in the context of EFL education in China. Jing Ivy Huang develops a framework which integrates global and local curricula for one specific kindergarten which can be applied by other researchers in the early childhood field. Wei Mao, Laura Doan, and Victoria Handford focus on Chinese teachers’ understanding of play in supporting young children’s English learning. Finally, Suhao Peng reviews the book ‘Interculturality Between East and West: Unthink, Dialogue and Rethink’.

Setting course for boundary-crossing innovation

In addition to 20 or more exciting papers, the balance of 2022 holds much in store for IJCE’s continued growth and development. We continue engagement with members of our esteemed Editorial Board and grow the Editorial team. A host of exiting papers in the editorial and production pipeline will come online. Among these, we will start to publish papers from three special collections being curated by visiting editors. These editors have been invited to engage with a wide array of particularly next-generation scholars from all around the world. Reaching out for new authors and research perspectives helps build diverse and richer insights into China-relevant facets of education. Of course, IJCE continues to publish top-quality articles from renown scholars at prestigious universities, as we expand publication of brilliant, robust and imaginative articles from scholars everywhere.

Please, send us your articles, reach out to us for editorial advice on how to position, write or refine your paper, enjoy reading and citing the substantial IJCE back catalogue, and encourage your colleagues to read, contribute to and use the papers. Especially, help to review papers, which is important not just for IJCE but also for growing the scholarly community and your own academic skills. Send us a proposal to serve as editor for a special collection. IJCE is particularly interested in hot topics and emerging directions. There are many options, and we look forward to collaborating.

As discussed at the outset, for instance, the theory and practice of ‘TBE’ is in its infancy and is an idea undergoing rapid and radical development. Several significant trajectories are emerging. We sketch these in closing as prompts for imagination, discussion, research, and publication.

With the world undergoing several upheavals, what does this mean for the past, present and future of higher education? Looking back at history, how has the ideal of university evolved? What kind of world map does today’s higher education present? In the fierce battle between tradition and modernity, is it possible to find unchanging values of higher education? How can higher education excellence and diversity be established amid an interplay of multiple cultures?

The pandemic has accelerated the convergence of technology and higher education. Artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing, virtual reality and other technologies are widely used in teaching, administration and policy making in higher education, making flexible learning time and space and personalized learning content a reality. Are universities ready to embrace hybrid and online teaching approaches as part of core infrastructure and institutional support? Will the use of these tools make a profound and long-term difference in improving the quality of higher education? Will the ethics and equity of higher education be compromised as a result? And how will the Internet era affect learners’ learning experience and identity?

Finally, what of the positionality of education in society. The reshaping of the value of education requires a rethinking of the relationship between institutions and society. In the ever-changing international society, how should education institutions coordinate with other actors like
governments, enterprises, international organizations, communities to act in more socially responsible ways, serve society, and promote education equity? What can be done to increase the social involvement and ethical engagement of universities? How can universities play an active role in the international community to solve major problems that affect human survival and development, and create a sustainable future for all?

Taking a transboundary perspective to education helps to discern patterns in published research, consequences for education, new practical dynamics, and emerging research frontiers. Such analysis helps to forecast future direction of higher education research and innovation. As Editors we look forward to cultivating and guiding such contribution.

**ORCID iD**

Hamish Coates [https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5763-3229](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5763-3229)

**References**

Aatif, M. (2022). Attitude and motivation of arab learners learning Chinese language in China: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221089103](https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221089103)

Chen, J. Y.-W. (2022). Implementation of the Hanyu shuiping Kaoshi and its home edition during the covid-19 pandemic: A survey of European test centres: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221100877](https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221100877)

Cui, B., McCallum, F., & White, M. A. (2022). An exploration of rural Chinese teachers’ wellbeing: Insights from mixture modelling of latent profile analysis: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221097719](https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221097719)

Cui, B., White, M. A., & McCallum, F. (2022). Exploring rural Chinese teachers’ attitudes towards wellbeing: Qualitative findings from appreciative semi-structured interviews: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221092849](https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221092849)

Ge, S., Hai Leng, C., & Baharudin, S. M. (2022). The effect of multimedia and temporal contiguity principles on students’ attitude and retention in learning Japanese language: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221099964](https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221099964)

Huang, J. I. (2022). A conceptual framework for developing a glocalized school-based curriculum: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221112526](https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221112526)

Kazuyuki, M. (2022). Can managerialism promote organizational transformation in private universities? International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/22125868211067288](https://doi.org/10.1177/22125868211067288)

Li, X., & Longpradit, P. (2022). The effectiveness of guideline to improve intercultural sensitivity in cross-cultural management: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/22125868211072932](https://doi.org/10.1177/22125868211072932)

Lin, X., & Dai, Y. (2022). An exploratory study of the effect of online learning readiness on self-regulated learning: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221111938](https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221111938)

Mao, W., Doan, L. K., & Handford, V. (2022). The use of play in English as a foreign language classrooms: Chinese teachers’ perspectives: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221113380](https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221113380)

Nicol, S., & Bice, S. (2022). Negotiating transboundary crises in higher education: Tsinghua University’s shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/22125868211073147](https://doi.org/10.1177/22125868211073147)

Peng, S. (2022). Book review: Interculturality between East and West: Unthink, dialogue, rethink: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221116374](https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221116374)

Sung, J., Sheng, Y. Z., Liu, A. K., Xinhu, A. C., Liu, L., & Coates, H. (2022). Augmenting the role of higher education institutions in lifelong learning: Designing an indicator framework for policy application: International Journal of Chinese Education. [https://doi.org/10.1177/22125868211072931](https://doi.org/10.1177/22125868211072931)
Xie, Q. (2022). Using task-based approach in business English courses for English-majors at a Chinese university: International Journal of Chinese Education. https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X2210999104

Zhang, X., Huang, Y., & Liu, Y. (2022). Enhancing language task engagement in the instructed language classroom: Voices from Chinese English as a foreign language students and teachers: International Journal of Chinese Education. https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X2210977718

Zhang, Y. (2022). Rethinking internationalization at home from a system perspective: Evidence from China’s higher education institutions: International Journal of Chinese Education. https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X221095881

Zhao, S., & Ebanda de B’beri, B. (2022). Identity negotiation of Chinese international students in Canada: A study on cosmopolitan post-graduation settlement: International Journal of Chinese Education. https://doi.org/10.1177/22125868211059197

Zheng, G. (2022). Book Review: Research Handbook on Academic Careers and Managing Academics: International Journal of Chinese Education. https://doi.org/10.1177/22125868211061993