It seems obvious that “comparative investigation is of little value if it serves documentation only,” while “its significance lies in informed interpretation of the interplay between context, policy-making and opportunities for fulfillment” (King, 2000, p. 268). In this sense, Max Weber’s understanding that “the purpose of comparative study is the explanation of a given historical problem” (1968, p. xxxi) limits the role of comparative education studies.

Although Marc-Antoine Jullien, the so-called “founding father” of comparative education, first used the term “comparative education” in his Esquisse et Vues Préalimaries d’un Ouvrage sur L’éducation Comparé published in 1817, comparative education as a modern discipline emerged...
in the twentieth century. Comparativists placed more emphasis on analyzing the decisive factors of educational systems in different countries than on superficially borrowing or transplanting the educational experiences of other countries. In his multi-volume *Special Reports on Educational Subjects* and famous essay *How Far Can We Learn Anything of Practical Value from the Study of Foreign Systems of Education*, the British comparativist Michael Ernest Sadler argued against studying education in an isolated context, underscoring the need to examine all decisive factors that influence the educational system as well as the cultural background of education. Sadler also suggested that countries use the national character to illustrate educational thinking and practice and recognize the purpose of learning in foreign countries as a means of improving their own educational system (as cited in Bereday, 1964b). Sadler’s thoughts on comparative education greatly influenced American comparativist Isaac Leon Kandel, whose research typifies factor analysis. According to Kandel, “The chief value of a comparative approach to problems lies in an analysis of the causes which have produced them, in a comparison of the differences between the various systems and the reasons underlying them, and, finally, a study of the solutions attempted” (1933, p. xix).

The application of methods from the social sciences in the study of comparative education has served to expand its research scope and produce more research outcomes. Bereday (1964a) proposed four steps leading to a full-scale comparative treatment. His students, Noah and Eckstein (1969), subsequently proposed quantitative methods for conducting comparative studies. Relating the context, concepts, and operations of comparative education to the purpose of comparative studies, British scholar Edmund King (1979) emphasized that comparative education research should contribute to key policymaking and performance in education. Meanwhile, the emergence of critical theories, including dependency theory and conflict theory in the 1970s, have further inspired comparative education research. Nonetheless, surveying a total of 472 articles published by *Comparative Education* between 1977 and 1998 in terms of context, content, and comparison, Little (2000) found that only a small number of articles published during this period had adopted an explicitly comparative approach, with the majority of articles focusing on single countries. Pointing to the challenges of globalization, Little (2000) noted, “there is a fresh opportunity to reconstruct comparative education in ways that integrate rather than separate knowledge about education and development among the richest and the poorest social groups and countries” (p. 291).

Analyzing the implications of globalization for comparative education, Green (2003) pointed out that the exclusively national way of thinking has become outdated and that comparativists should cease taking nation-states as the only units for comparison and include sub-national and supranational regions as study areas. Green (2003) also argued that the main methodological challenge for comparative educationalists did not pertain to the levels of analysis but the nature and value of
comparative analysis itself. In this respect, he insisted that “globalization does not reduce the usefulness of comparative analysis, although in creating educational spaces which belong exclusively to neither nations nor systems, it makes us look to broadening our units of analysis” (Green, 2003, p. 95). As before, the two major challenges facing comparative education today are “to make the field genuinely comparative” and “to bring it back from its relative isolation into the mainstream of comparative social science/historical sociology where it rightly belongs” (Green, 2003, p. 95). More recently, amid the continued intensification of the globalization of migration, Guo (2019) has responded to the changing nature of comparative and international education by calling for a new research agenda for researching education in the age of transnational migration.

The history of the formal collaboration between Canada and China with respect to education can be traced to the 1970s, when the two countries established diplomatic relations primarily in the form of “Canadian development programmes, featuring a strong sense of ‘internationalism’ but remaining largely unilateral until the late 1990s” (Zha, 2011, p. 100). According to Zha (2016, para. 2), between 1981 and 2001, the Government of Canada offered a total of CAD 68.7 million to support the Canada-China Management Education Program (CCMEP), Canada-China University Linkage Program (CCULP), and the Special University Linkage Consolidation Program (SULCP). To be specific, the CCULP was funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the 1980s and 1990s with the aim of improving institutional capacity, which “supported the linkage of thirty-one institutions” (Zha, 2011, p. 100). The CCMEP has successfully “stimulated the renaissance of management and business education in Chinese universities” (p. 100). The later Special University Linkage Consolidation Program (SULCP), which was also funded by CIDA, “within its country development policy framework for China … supported eleven linkage projects involving twenty-five Canadian universities and more than two hundred Chinese universities, teaching hospitals, schools, other government agencies and non-government organizations” (p. 100). These programs “covered areas such as environmental science, marine science, engineering, management, law, agriculture, medicine, education, minority cultures and women’s studies,” significantly contributing to “rebuilding China’s teaching and research infrastructure in higher education” immediately after the “Cultural Revolution” as well as “China’s social transformation and progress” through the efforts of several universities and colleges in both countries (para. 2). In addition, since 1973, a significant number of Chinese scholars and students have benefited from the well-known Canada-China Scholars Exchange Program, which is funded by both the Canadian International Development Research Centre and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. According to Zha (2011), “[a]lltogether CIDA has invested more than 250 million Canadian dollars in higher education for China since the early 1980s” (p. 101). Moreover, with the exception of the Soviet Union in the 1950s, “it is hard to find any other country that has assisted
[in the] development of China’s higher education to a comparable level of generosity, particularly in view of the unique approach of pairing universities within an overall strategic perspective” (Zha, 2011, p. 101).

Moving into the twenty-first century, alongside the rapid and striking educational development in China, collaboration on education between the countries has become more bilateral. Nonetheless, the Canadian government and/or research organizations still fund several research projects and programs related to education in China. Moreover, Canadian higher education institutions are still offering educational services to their Chinese counterparts through a variety of programs. For instance, Canadian teacher education has unique strengths insofar as it “focus[es] on academic disciplines, pedagogical training, and an emphasis on field experience to enhance professional competency” (Guo & Pungur, 2008, p. 248), resulting in its being held in high esteem by other countries. Since 2009, the Faculty of Education of the University of British Columbia has hosted UBC-ECNU Excellent Teacher Training Program, providing undergraduate student participants from East China Normal University in Shanghai with the opportunity to experience Canadian teaching practices and theories with a focus on K-12 education in British Columbia each year.

In response to the changing world and the changing nature of comparative education studies and in the light of the history of educational collaboration between Canada and China, we organize this Special Issue with the hope of inheriting and further developing the pre-modern and modern disciplinary tradition of comparative education, which has always argued against studying education issues in an isolated context. More importantly, we wish to enhance the mutual understanding of educational issues, especially those pertaining to teacher education, in China and Canada in the current complex global context. With respect to teacher education, apart from a few exceptions (Guo & Pungur, 2008), there is a dearth of literature on comparative studies of teacher education in both countries. In particular, Guo and Pungur (2008) highlighted the importance of cross-cultural dialogue in teacher education. In addition to discussing the possibility of applying the professionalized Canadian teacher education model and curriculum in improving China’s pedagogical preparation and pre-service teaching practice, Guo and Pungur (2008) considered the merits of China’s teacher education model, arguing that its disposition toward teaching could contribute to “creating truly well rounded and committed teachers” alongside Canadian teaching models (p. 267). As such, this Special Issue is our attempt to fill in a gap and foster cross-cultural dialogue between China and Canada on teacher education.

This Special Issue comprises five outstanding articles by scholars from Canada1 and China. Zhou et al. (2022) examine how Chinese teacher candidates’ understanding of and practice in science education have been influenced by an international exchange program in teacher education between a Canadian university and a Chinese university and how their learning
experience through this international exchange program has transformed their teaching in China. From a critical sociological perspective, the article by Guo and Guo (2022) examines the experience and interpretation of teacher candidates related to the internationalization at home in Canada through the theoretical lens of the social imaginary, Canadian exceptionalism, and social inclusion. At the macro level, Hwami (2022) analyzes the impact of authoritarian neoliberalism on pedagogy. From a critical perspective, he links education with the larger social environment, viewing international economic sanctions as a neoliberal instrument of coercion, prompting readers to reflect on the crisis that neoliberalism has brought to education and proposing thoughtful suggestions for critical pedagogy. While moving beyond the main-stream disciplines, Hector and Salinitri (2022) look at the experiential learning of pre-service physical education teachers in both Canada and China. Lastly, Zhang et al. (2022) explore and compare pre-service science teachers’ perspectives on the Nature of Science in China and Canada.

Essentially, all the papers in the Special Issue employ a comparative perspective, and the authors explore their research questions within a cross-cultural context or a country-specific focus. Both the insights from empirical studies and theoretical critiques contribute to the comparative research on teacher education in Canada, China, and beyond. The three research papers of this Special Issue have been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, indicating a significant research motivation for mutual understanding. Almost all the authors who have contributed to this volume have transnational education and/or working experience. This makes their unique observations even more valuable. Indeed, their experience contributes to comparative education research through country-specific or linear comparisons on the one hand, but more importantly, elucidation of the tensions existing in the transnational context on the other. We hope that we have presented a thoughtful and stimulating collection and look forward to more solid theoretical and/or empirical research on comparative and international education in the new age of transnational migration.

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Note
1. Munyaradzi Hwami received his academic training and used to work in Canada. Although his article does not directly pertain to a Chinese or Canadian context, it discusses a broader concern across the world and was thus included in this issue.

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