Diamond open global research on Chinese education

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Abstract
In this editorial we take stock IJCE’s shift from a prestigious paper-oriented small-scale journal into a journal focused on globally open publication. Taking stock of the first 11 months, we look at characteristics and implications of this shift, metrics of success, and review published article highlights.

Keywords
Open access, Chinese education, education innovation, global education

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Academic publishing has a global and open future! Please enjoy reading IJCE papers, contribute articles, and make contact if you would like to engage as an editor or reviewer.

It has long worried people who study the ‘idea industry’ that governments fund public universities to create and publish knowledge for society, then those same institutions are compelled to buy-back access to their own publications. In recent years, such worries have percolated into louder rumbles among universities, systems, funders and governments. Resulting discussions have helped to clarify problems, and importantly also pathways ahead.

It can be hard, even for senior faculty, to grapple with publishing industry transformations which are invariably global, conservative and commercial in nature. A major challenge is that quality publishing costs money and someone must pay, most commonly authors, readers or research institutions. As well, scientific review has encountered headwinds as research communities have diversified beyond small clusters of ‘peers’. The growth of predatory and

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non-reviewed journals has further enhanced the flux of often not very well articulated or understood publishing options.

Three colour-coded forms of ‘open access’ stand out amid this muddle. ‘Green’ open access involves authors giving up copyright of their peer-reviewed articles and at the same time making a version freely available for readers and authors. With ‘gold’ open access someone, typically authors, pays to make peer-reviewed and copyrighted articles available for sharing on websites under creative commons licenses. The real jewel in this publishing crown is ‘diamond’ or ‘platinum’ open access which is sponsored and hence free and open for both authors and readers.

As we conveyed in our last editorial, IJCE has been fortunate to receive funding by Tsinghua University to enable it to partner with SAGE Publications and shift from a paper-oriented subscription model to a globally open online model. 2021 is the first year of IJCE’s life as a diamond or platinum free open access journal.

After less than a year, the results are clear. Thirty five articles are on track to be published in 2021, up from around 15 per year since 2012. Between 2012 and 2020, IJCE articles were downloaded 696 times in total. In the first 9 months of 2021 alone, IJCE articles were downloaded 23,957 times, so likely 25,000 by the end of the year. This is more than a 3500% increase. It is proof that phenomenal value has been unlocked from readers accessing a trove of excellent articles. Though citation statistics lag by around 2 years, total journal citations have also doubled in the last year, starting from a low base and now showing parabolic growth.

These two simple bibliometrics affirm the broad point at the start of this article, that academic publishing has an open future. This spurs important insights and has important implications, five of which are noted here.

First, the world is keen to learn about China and Chinese education, and audience for research of the kind published in IJCE is growing. The downloads and citations affirm a swift ramp-up in engagement, and upward momentum.

Second, there is demand for a broad array of research on Chinese education, ranging from early childhood, include school, and into vocational, higher and adult education. While far from a perfect guide, analysis of IJCE article keywords since 2011 shows the breadth of topics discussed in IJCE articles. The articles touch on countries and areas, all levels of education, graduate and education professional employment/careers, analytical methods and technologies, all major education activities, psychological topics, policy and strategy, and of course students.

Third, the role for English language education journals in Asia is growing. Such advance is spurred by the size of education in Asia, the speed of sector transformation, and surely also the comparative lack of research. Asia only has a handful of English language journals in the field of education, signalling opportunities for expanding contributions.

Fourth, locking research up behind digital paywalls hinders the creation of considerable value, spurring the need to value the opportunity costs and examine alternative finance options. This carries implications for research funding and researcher motivation. It also raises questions about prevailing, and still quite new, metrics used to value ‘article quality’. Particularly in professional and applied fields like education, it is increasingly difficult to

Fifth, the growth of IJCE has spotlighted the need for papers by Chinese researchers, citations by Chinese researchers, and peer review by Chinese researchers. While publication in a small selection of journals has been incentivised in the last decade by a broad swathe of recognition arrangements, getting research out matters more for impact and overall contribution.

Editors, authors, reviewers and researchers focus on these kinds of publishing implications. The main thing, however, is that articles are being read and providing value to readers. Around 30 reviewed articles are slated for publication in IJCE each year. A few highlight articles are reviewed here to signpost the diversity of content.
Ka Ho Mok, Weiyan Xiong and Hamzah Nor Bin Aedy Rahman focused on the quality of online learning during the pandemic. The authors investigated how students in higher education institutions in Hong Kong evaluated their online learning experiences during the pandemic, including the factors influencing their digital learning experiences. The research examined how online learning and teaching was nuanced to cultivate students’ competence for the job market and personal fulfilment. More specifically, the article addressed several questions. Can the current emergency online learning effectively equip students with the needed competencies for the future job market? How far could the current emergency online learning prepare students to adapt to the changing landscape of higher education, society and personal life? This study highlights the significant contributions of the community of inquiry, which placed social presence on the promotion of a whole person development that could not be achieved when relying on online learning. Findings encourage university leaders and instructors to search for multiple course delivery modes to nurture students to become caring leaders with the 21st century skills and knowledge set.

Susan Robertson from the University of Cambridge focused on the global competences and 21st century higher education, and discussed why they matter. Sher reviewed new education solutions to global problems and discussed limitations. The paper stimulated a conversation around three related questions. How do we understand the challenges of this global era? What might be the role of higher education in re-shaping this future? What competences might students need and how should be go about developing these? The paper discussed how to insert the idea of the global and the development of global competences into teaching and learning in order to enable students to engage with the challenges of the global through higher education. It offered a six-step dialogic approach to promoting the idea of global awareness and cultural competences.

Marcin Gierczyk and Rui Diao analysed socio-educational contexts surrounding the Gaokao. The Gaokao is a hot topic in contemporary Chinese society. Participants compete for top university places as a gateway to a sound career, social prestige, and material well-being. People from all walks of life have different attitudes and understandings towards Gaokao. Marcin Gierczyk and Rui Diao examined how Chinese female students from top Chinese universities perceive the preparatory period for the Gaokao exam. Using semi-structured, in-depth interview and an open-ended interviews, this study attempts to see the world from the perspective of the respondents and thereby unfold the meaning of their experiences and to uncover their lived world. The findings suggest that an evaluative dichotomy can characterize the exam itself and exam preparation period. Although initially this time was seen in terms of immense sacrifice and was highly intense, positive attitudes to the găokăo exam dominated, and the exam was considered a fair and equitable selection method.

In another article, Carolijn van Noort discussed how Chinese students learn and are taught in the United Kingdom. This research focuses on short-term continuing professional development courses, and explores the application of constructivist learning approaches in regard to teaching and learning. Through her analysis Carolijn van Noort makes a conceptual contribution to enhancing the debate on the nature and practice of continuing professional development in the United Kingdom from an intercultural educational perspective.

Leo Goedegebure analysed the myths and mysteries of leadership in higher education. He looked at how relationships between leadership, management and institutional performance bedevils the higher education community. Believers argue that leadership and management matters for institutional performance, and critics consider that the notion of managerialism has invaded institutions. The article articulates a third line, probing evidence for a relationship between leadership, management and performance. It starts the study on the effectiveness of management and leadership development across all industries, before turning to higher education. Based on meta-analyses, international comparative review studies, and industry study the article concludes that with respect to higher education, there is scant evidence that leadership development
programs are instrumental to improved institutional performance. Goedegebuure analyses a case study program which carries potential to address this conundrum.

Hongqing Yang and Minjie Wu analyse case studies of who studies at international branch campuses in China. International Branch Campuses (IBCs) have grown rapidly, and China is the largest host country of IBCs. But the student characteristics of IBCs remain ignored in academic literature. The authors fill the gap by exploring academic performance and survey responses and painting a broader picture of the student characteristics at an IBC in China. Research shows that the rapid development of IBCs provides more educational opportunities for students. Meanwhile, the development of IBCs in China favours urban and socioeconomically advantaged students and rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged students are under-represented at this IBC. The researchers analyse implications for institutions and the broader community.

Each year, IJCE seeks to publish a small number of excellent student papers. Juan Zhang sheds light on the social and individual circumstances of learning in her article on the peer effects on university students’ academic self-concept. She adopted a two-level linear model and translated the big-fish-little-pond effect (BFLPE) model from schools to universities. She analysed the BFLPE on talented students in an elite university and used longitudinal analysis to clarify their academic self-concept. The results indicate that peer achievements had negative effects on the self-concept of competent students in the elite university. Additionally, student/faculty interactions and university support had remarkable effects on self-concept. This can be attributed to positive forms of interaction such as cooperation learning, communication, and collaborative activities, which carry significant benefit to students. The research concludes that universities should provide more activities for students to enable their interaction with lecturers and peers, both in and out of classroom.

Chinese higher education institutions have experienced an unprecedented expansion and major reforms since the late 1990s. The transformative growth has established the largest higher education system in the world and transformed an elite system to a post-massified one over the last two decades. Bowen Xu explores the historical development of higher education expansion in China, investigating its rationales, practices and contradictions, as well as emerging policy trends and future challenges of Chinese higher education. It analyses three questions. First, under what conditions has the massification policy been adopted, and with what strategies? Second, what are the social and economic effects of this policy? Third, what are key challenges in post-massification era, and how can these be addressed in governance? The article highlights the role and capacity of the state in managing the massifying and transitioning higher education system, and discusses policy implications for a renewed governance arrangements.

As well as research articles, IJCE also publishes book reviews and editorials. This year we have published reviews of three books due for release about rankings, about university leadership, and about academic work. Book reviews weave together journals with these longer contributions, and help build important communities of scholarship. They are also an excellent way for graduate students and young scholars to get engaged in the world of scholarly publishing and see their ideas in print.

2022 will be the IJCE’s first full year in press in the new format. As well as publishing accepted articles from those submitted online, a suite of curated contributions will be published. Please help us grow IJCE’s value and contribution! Your expertise is vital to the journal’s success. IJCE has already proven itself as an open and resilient platform which spurs integration, imagination, innovation and change. We look forward to deepening its contribution and impact.

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