International student education in China: An “Island” in Internationalization?

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Abstract
While many studies have studied Chinese international student experiences, including their motivations, choices, and socio-cultural adaptations, few have systematically analyzed the connection of international student education (ISE) to society. This paper incorporates the “internationalization in higher education for society” framework and the “glonacal agency heuristic” to examine ISE in China in relation to the goals of social justice, economic development, and public goods. The findings reveal dilemmas in institutional practices and instances of disconnection from local society, while also pointing to potential contributions to global society. The causes include instrumentalist values, competing policy priorities, and constrained institutional agency. China’s case offers practical implications for reconceptualizing ISE for other emerging student-receiving nations. Furthermore, this case may also contribute to growing scholarly discussions on integrating the internationalization of higher education into universities’ third mission of service to society across different countries. We argue that ISE should be designed and implemented comprehensively with intention and purpose, and undergirded by strengthened institutional agency directed to serve society.

Keywords
Internationalization, higher education, international student education, social justice, public good

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Introduction

The university’s third mission of service to society has not been the central focus of the broad agenda or systematic strategies of international higher education across different countries (Brandenburg et al., 2020; de Wit, 2020; de Wi et al., 2015; 2022; Maassen et al., 2019). International student education worldwide is characterized by ad hoc, reactive, fragmented, and unrelated activities which lack social engagement (Knight & de Wit, 2018). Although the discussion is ongoing, few studies have systematically analyzed the connection of Chinese international education with society. Despite China having 500,000 international students and becoming Asia’s top study-abroad destination as of 2019 (MOE, 2019a), recent research indicates that the intended soft power objectives are not well-achieved (Mulvey, 2020). This article evaluates and assesses to what extent China’s international student education – a critical piece of internationalization of higher education – engages with local and broader society.

Different from many other countries, there is a specific term in Chinese to refer to education for foreign students: international student education (ISE, 来华留学教育, lai hua liu xue sheng jiao yu). Such terminology is not commonly used in western literature because the education of international students is usually an integrated part of domestic student education in many receiving countries. However, international students in China are legally required to live in designated accommodation which is apart from accommodation for domestic students. In addition, in order to attract international students, programs are offered in which the language of instruction is English with a curriculum designed differently than that of domestic students. Such program and policy arrangements further limit the feasibility of international students and domestic students sharing the same classroom.

This study is part of a multi-year research project on China’s internationalization of higher education under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to improve regional integration, increase trade and stimulate economic growth. The primary goal of the larger research project is to evaluate the development of institutional practices and student outcomes related to internationalization of higher education. The research methods include policy analysis, a survey, and 49 semi-structured interviews with academics, directors, students and graduates, and employers. This paper zooms in on international student education and its social impacts and engagement with broader society, and we present findings that are derived from the larger project’s questions. The findings address the research questions: What is the current condition of ISE in China in terms of its connection with society? And what are the shaping forces? We hope that the case of China can serve as a reference for other emerging international student host destinations and institutions when designing international student recruitment and education policies.

Theoretical insights

Over the past few years, scholars have been developing the conversation around connecting internationalization of higher education activities to the “third mission” in order to benefit local and global communities (Leask & de Gayardon, 2021; Jones et al., 2021). To counter the isolation and fragmentation of national and institutional higher education internationalization activities, scholars have advocated for more purposeful rationales (Knight, 2012), comprehensive internationalization on campus (Hudzik, 2011), and intelligent internationalization that involves key stakeholders (Rumbley, 2019).

The contribution to society of internationalization of higher education is emphasized through an evolving definition and framework. In 2015, de Wit et al. proposed a normative definition that “integrates an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for
all students and staff and make a meaningful contribution to society” (p. 29). Under the social context of rising populism, xenophobia, environmental issues, and inequalities worldwide, Brandenburg et al. (2020) further developed the Internationalization of Higher Education for Society (IHES) concept. Hazelkorn (2016) further developed a three-model typology, namely the social justice model, the economic development model, and the public good model to identify the goals universities should pursue to serve society, within which any internationalization activity could serve one or several goals at the same time (pp. 43–44). The social justice goals focus on addressing social disadvantage and also emphasize students, service-learning, and community empowerment (Brandenburg et al., 2020). Specific aspects include general public education, capacity building, and supporting active citizenship. The economic development goals center on local/regional economic growth, developing countries’ economic growth, and knowledge transfer. The public good goals emphasize the public nature of international higher education, on making the world better and contributing to community development and revitalization activities. Many aspects of international higher education are within the public good goals, such as supporting social integration, developing global citizens, and supporting science and knowledge diplomacy/soft power (see Brandenburg et al., 2020, p. 43, for the complete list).

As the IHES framework was mainly developed from the European context, in this research we extended and applied the three-model typology framework to ISE in China in discussion on the connection between ISE and society. The social justice goals concern both domestic and ISE equity. The economic development goals are examined for local, regional, and international economic needs, knowledge transfer, and labor market conditions. We have incorporated the public good interpretations from Huang and Horiuchi (2020) and Tian and Liu (2021): Chinese international education is a public good deeply influenced by collectivist culture and by government policies and funding. Public good goals and outcomes are mostly not achieved in the current context and require the greatest improvement by almost all standards. Instead of discussing the deficiencies at length, we provide positive examples to illustrate how the public good goals could be potentially fulfilled through ISE.

Actors within ISE, primarily universities, departments, and leaders, are able to exercise agency, action, and influence at global, national, and/or local levels. The “glonacal agency heuristic” (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002) of actors at various levels has influenced our research design – existing studies about ISE in China often assume the central government promotes all actions without closely examining local institutional practices, agencies, and relevant stakeholders. The “glonacal agency heuristic” influenced our research design because existing studies about ISE in China often assume the central government promotes all actions without closely examining the local institutional practices, agencies, and relevant stakeholders. Learning from the “glonacal agency heuristic,” our study included a wide range of respondents, including university ISE directors, management staff, international students, teaching faculty, and human resource managers.

Research context: international student education in China

Since China’s opening-up reform in 1978, the internationalization of higher education has been transforming national higher education through many important policies and plans (Ma, 2017; Vogel, 2011; Wen, 2016). The university system has evolved into a large, hierarchical, and diversified structure, with tiers and groups of institutions having different positioning and goals, foremostly piloted by the “985 Project”, “211 Project”, and “C9 League” institutions. The current international higher education landscape is also vast in scale. In 2018, 1,004 of these (mostly public) institutions received nearly 492,185 international students, and 50% are degree students (MOE, 2019b, 2020). Within degree seekers, 85% (421,062) are undergraduate students and 12%
are doctoral students. 12.81% of the total number of international students are government scholarship recipients (MOE, 2019c). More than 60% of students come from Asia (52.95% from BRI countries) and 17% from Africa. Engineering, management, and medicine have become the competitive choice of study (Wen et al., 2017).

China’s motivation to develop ISE was to serve national strategy, from promoting the communist ideology in the 1950s to assisting the new global plan in the 21st century. University reputation, diplomacy, and soft power are the most prominent rationales behind ISE (Gao & Liu, 2020; Haugen, 2013; Wen & Hu, 2019; Wu, 2019). However, Huang (2020) pointed out that the soft power projection of China’s ISE has been unsuccessful because it has been unable to export good practices in specialized undergraduate education and quality assurance to BRI countries. Chinese universities, particularly research universities, aim to perform well on proxy indicators such as publications in English and international student and faculty numbers to improve their rankings (Wen & Cui, 2020), and are rewarded by the strong state that is, the central government of China for good performance on internationalization indicators in rankings and other evaluations (Zha et al., 2019).

One distinct characteristic in governing China’s ISE is the government-institution partnership. The central government controls overall policy orientation and quality assurance, delegating administrative power to institutions. Such a process contrasts the strict government control in the national higher education of domestic students. Universities have the power to operate ISE in the process of recruitment, curriculum and teaching, finance, and administration, all within the overarching regulatory legal framework (Wen & Wang, 2022).

Many studies have further shown that on-campus segregation of international students and domestic students from admission to graduation have led to cross-cultural adaptation challenges, pedagogical and linguistic barriers, and education quality concerns for international student education in China (Ding, 2016; Li, 2015; Ma & Zhao, 2018; Tian et al., 2020). These scholars have further raised questions regarding justice, quality, and equity issues, including in relation to the use of scholarships to attract international students and the role of agents in the international student recruitment process. Existing policy texts on ISE have only focused on the diplomatic functions and soft power goals (Wen et al., 2018), rather than on ISE’s societal functions such as social justice, economic development, and public goods. The IHES framework serves as a guide to identify the gaps, and we hope to develop recommendations for the future improvement of China’s ISE policy.

Research methodology

We designed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research project to comprehensively understand and generate new insights into ISE (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). We firstly designed a survey, which included three dimensions, seven indicators, and 109 questions that targeted university ISE leaders. The survey questions used a four-point Likert-type scale: “completely agree”, “relatively agree”, “relatively disagree”, and “completely disagree”. We aimed to understand the motivations, goals, actions, and outcomes for carrying out ISE and the agency of individual universities at the local level (see Appendix A, ISE Survey Question Design). We used stratified sampling to determine 180 institutions located in different geographic locations and to represent the diversity of research-intensive and non-research institutions. In total, 107 out of 180 valid questionnaires were returned. The sample comprised research-intensive universities (73.83%) and non-research universities (mainly at the provincial level) (26.17%) (See Appendix B, Table 1). Using descriptive statistics, we summarized the attitude and value, implementation, and self-evaluation of different types of institutions towards internationalization of higher
education. We then analyzed the differences across the institutions with one-way ANOVA means comparison.

We further collected qualitative data to explore the initial quantitative results. We followed up with 49 semi-structured interviews to clarify the survey results (See Appendix B. Table 2 and Table 3). On the one hand, the purposeful sampling method was used to interview 17 directors, staff, faculty, and human resource managers of the internationalization departments of the universities. On the other hand, the snowball sampling method was used to interview 32 international students and graduates in the form of face-to-face or video interviews. To explore the agency of international students, institutions, and employers within the labor market in ISE, we asked questions based on findings from the survey to further understand the perceptions of value, motivation, implementation, and challenges of internationalization of higher education in China. Furthermore, as national policy plays a substantial role in supervising institutions and market positions and strategies in China, we also examined recent policy documents to understand the survey and interview contents. As a three-person team, we imported the transcribed interviews and selected policy texts into NVivo software and conducted analysis in a group.

**Main findings**

**Current conditions**

Below we present the findings within in the order of social justice, economic development, and public good goals.

**Social justice goals.** Overall, the uneven distribution of international students in China has exacerbated the inequality and imbalance internal to the stratified higher education system, while from a global perspective, ISE has provided learning opportunities for students from the Global South. International students, either self-funded or with government scholarships, are a significant revenue source to universities.

Our data show research-intensive universities \((N=79)\) received an average of 962 students per institution, while non-research universities \((N = 28)\) hosted 159 students per institution. Moreover, research-intensive universities enrolled a higher proportion \((74.07\%)\) of government scholarship students. Looking at the geographic distribution, ISE has intensified the existing regional inequality within China’s higher education. In Beijing and Shanghai, international students per institution averaged 530, coastal areas averaged 262, border areas averaged 205, and inland averaged only 188. The disproportionate distribution of international students meant that universities at the “center,” not the “periphery” (Altbach, 2016), benefited most from ISE’s economic gains (tuitions and fees) and international influence (intercultural exposure opportunities). This reality perpetuates the imbalance between research-intensive and non-research universities and does not support social justice goals of public and institutional capacity building.

Although it has aggravated the inequity within the Chinese higher education system, ISE has recruited students from less-resourced countries in the Global South and thus cultivated talent via a group of undergraduates, graduates, and professionals for developing regions in Asia and Africa with favorable enrolment quotas and scholarships. In 2017, 160,323 degree-seekers in China came from Asia \((66.37\%)\) and 51,959 from Africa \((21.51\%)\). Aside from South Korea and the United States, most of the top 10 sending countries were middle-income countries: Pakistan \((8.76\%)\), India \((7.84\%)\), Thailand \((4.93\%)\), Laos \((3.55\%)\), Kazakhstan \((3.53\%)\), Indonesia \((3.36\%)\), Russia \((3.33\%)\), and Vietnam \((2.72\%)\) (MOE, 2019a).
Economic development goals. Recent economic studies have shown the positive relationship between ISE and international trade and investment in student sending countries (Gu & Qiu, 2017; Ha & Chen, 2020). Our findings revealed that ISE indirectly contributes to regional economic development and trade through Chinese language training, Chinese cultural exposure, and the building of personal connections for international students. The economic development is most visible in the graduates’ participation in Sino-foreign trade. When asked about the reasons for sending students to Chinese universities, one Thai university leader responded the following:

China and ASEAN’s free trade agreement has enabled the close economic relations between China and Thailand. It is reflected in bilateral trade and investment and services, trade, finance, and tourism. Thailand’s labour market has a growing demand for Chinese-speaking labour. (D6)

90% of Thai students mentioned that the trade between China and Thailand prompted them to study in China. More than 50% of the interviewed international students said they would have greater advantages when they return to their home country in terms of employment. Student ST 21 stated that:

Studying in China can help me better understand the market environments in both China and Thailand and establish personal connections. I will accumulate experience dealing with and doing business with Chinese. It will lay a good foundation for me to rapidly enter into the Sino-Thai trade industry in the future, which is also an ideal result.

From the institutional side, when asked to rate the benefits of international student education, institutional education leaders at different types of institutions gave the highest rating on “increase institutional funding” (see Table 4. Economic Benefits of ISE). On average, the economic gain of ISE is more evident for institutions that are lower level, and those located in metropolitan cities, but the differences are not statistically significant.

However, aside from tuition and financial gains, the local economy sees limited benefits. Nearly all international graduate interviewees stated that they had few opportunities to participate in the local economy. ISE leaders stated that barriers such as the cumbersome and complicated process of obtaining and renewing work visas create barriers, such that most international graduates are not eligible to apply for work and so return to their home countries. Responses from human resource managers indicated that within China, as a non-immigrant nation with a surplus of domestic college graduates, Chinese companies have low demand for absorbing foreign graduates into the domestic labor force, “we do not need fresh international graduates, but we need high-skilled international professionals” (H2).

Public good goals. Our data show that universities achieved the public good goals differently, as outlined by Brandenburg et al. (2020). The suggested goals included supporting social integration, developing global citizens, and supporting science and knowledge diplomacy/soft power.

When universities evaluated how international student education contributed to aspects relating to the public good, we saw stark differences among different levels and types of institutions (Table 5. Public Good Benefits of ISE). Evidence suggests that the better quality and more highly ranked research universities provide more public good benefits, science and knowledge diplomacy in particular, through international student education. The highly ranked research universities scored statistically significantly higher than non-research universities on several important items: promoted international collaboration (p = .037), strengthened scientific research and knowledge creation (p = .002), and improved university status and reputation (p = .027).
Furthermore, there existed regional differences in the public good provision of ISE, where institutions located in megacities provide more public good benefits through international student education. Metropolitan megacities scored statistically significantly higher than inland universities on the following items: developed a more diverse range of educational programs \((p = .001)\), promoted students’ competency as global citizens \((p = .017)\), and faculty developed more international ambitions \((p = .005)\). Metropolitan megacities also scored statistically significantly higher than coastal universities on the item promoted students’ competency as global citizens \((p = .003)\). While the differences are not statistically significant, inland institutions consistently scored the lowest in terms of the public good goals.

There is evidence to suggest that the soft power projection, a public good goal of ISE, was not achieved. Although a few top research universities have gained global visibility, China’s overall higher education level and quality have not been recognized. Student ST 13 stated, “it is more challenging and expensive to study in European and American countries, which would be a financial burden for my family.” Similarly, ST 11 responded that “to apply for Chinese universities, I only need to submit transcripts, recommendation letters, and HSK\(^3\) level 5 proof, which are even less competitive than attending a university in my own country”. China remains a steppingstone for international students to enter higher education in global centers and semicenters.

**Shaping forces**

While the government plays an influential role in setting up the overall agenda of ISE and providing legal frameworks in China, ISE is largely left to universities’ discretion. However, we find that universities of different levels and regions are still reluctant to exercise agency, which confirms other scholars’ findings (Chan & Wu, 2020; Ma & Zhao, 2018; Zha et al., 2019). We discuss two main factors that lead to the current conditions of ISE in China, based on policy and our data.

**An instrumentalist view of ISE.** For Chinese universities, developing ISE is not a fundamental educational goal for improving education, academic research, and comprehensive internationalization. Rather, ISE is mainly treated as an instrument to achieve diplomatic purposes, as manifested in policy documents. International students are often described by the terms “non-official diplomats” or “aid to friend nations” within policy discourse: Students recruited by Chinese universities should be “elites and future leaders” (MOE, 2017a; 2017b). With this rationale, students are expected to shape opinion through positions of influence in their home countries and to be somewhat sympathetic towards their host country (China), resulting in improved bilateral relations. According to the survey answers on ISE motivation, improving university reputation (70.4\%) and serving national politics (50.4\%) were the most important motivations for carrying out ISE in Chinese universities.

The driving rationale for universities to increase their reputation and serve national politics was to obtain more resources from the government, such as scholarships or specialized funding. As one ISE leader explained: “it is so that the government would recognize our efforts and increase the possibility of obtaining more resources” (D4). Especially for border universities, increasing internationalization by recruiting international students is an effective way to obtain financial resources for their unique location and education conditions. Many non-research universities with much fewer resources than top research universities developed the “inertia” to keep growing ISE, because it is a salient and measurable internationalization indicator. As D3 puts it, “developing ISE has become inertia: you never need to think about why you do it. Since this job is available, ISE will be developed.”
Competing policy priorities. The current competing higher education policy priorities have set constraints on institutional agency in operating ISE. Internal tension pulls university administrators in two directions when developing higher education policy: being excellence-oriented and being aid-oriented. On the one hand, for excellence-oriented policies, China’s higher education policies have always focused on catching up with the higher education in developed countries (MOE, 2017c; Wen, 2017, 2018). This policy trend prompts Chinese universities to actively collaborate with faculty and doctoral students in top research universities in Europe and America. For instance, the latest “double first-class” policy explicitly expresses the ambition of transitioning from “participating” to “leading” scientific collaborations.

On the other hand, the aid-oriented BRI Higher Education Plan has a different educational target group because higher education policy in the BRI is based on enhancing soft power and public diplomacy. The BRI Education Plan bears the responsibility of “improving people-to-people connectedness,” and “emphasizing mutual understanding, cultural exchange, and student mobility” (MOE, 2016, n.p.). BRI countries have been top sending countries for China’s international students and scholarship students, and many joint research centers are established in the BRI border universities.

These two opposite orientations of internationalization have imposed constraints on universities that hoped to make decisions with more agency when carrying out ISE. Most universities want to occupy a place in the well-funded “double world-class” programs through the exchange of scientists, scholars, and students with the best research universities. Universities also hope to gain the government’s trust through service to the country by recruiting international students from BRI countries. This divided approach, coupled with an instrumentalist value orientation, has limited institutional agency and so become detrimental to ISE development in the long run.

Discussions and concluding remarks

This research addresses an important aspect of ISE: its connection with society, which has largely overshadowed by other topics, such as push and pull factors that affect individual mobility trends or national/global tensions that influence brain circulation. More recently, researchers in international higher education have begun to recognize that ISE has produced much social injustice, and that the economic incentive behind ISE has led to possibly more challenges than any benefits it may bring.

In this paper, we show that there is a long way for ISE to realize the goals of contributing to social justice, economic development, and the public good. Consequently, the current condition of ISE is similar to an “island,” situated within the separate-track campus system and not an accommodating macro societal system. The shaping forces behind the “island” are the instrumentalist values, competing policy orientations, and varying institutional agency levels. Universities are pulled in two directions: the excellence-oriented policy and the aid-oriented policy, each with different goals and activities. Fragmented internationalization activities in China are particularly salient due to the strong government influence, diplomatic and reputation prioritization, and oversupply of educated domestic labor.

The IHES framework by Brandenburg et al. (2020) is one of the few operational frameworks that can be applied to analyze the ISE to society relationship. One main challenge we encountered when developing this study was how to define and measure ISE achievements towards (global) public good(s) or (global) common goods, as termed in recent international student literature in Japan and China (Huang & Horiuchi, 2020; Tian & Liu, 2021). Tian and Liu (2021) stated various benefits, including global perspectives, global talents, mutual cultural exchange, and economic growth, as contributions by international student education towards (global) common goods. Huang and Horiuchi (2020) counted these same benefits as (global) public goods. The boundary of
these definitions seems to be converging and ambiguous, while philosophical debates around the “public” and “common” sphere of higher education continue (Deneulin & Townsend, 2007; Locatelli, 2018; McMahon, 2017). We find IHES to be a better framework to start with and to expand this conversation, because of the detailed separation of different sub-goals beneath an overall “public good” goal.

Nonetheless, there are also challenges of applying the IHES framework. First, the social justice, economic development, and public good goals were developed as list a specifically applied to the European context. In our application, there were many variations within sub-goals that required adjustments such as the list item, “improve European Union integration”. If the IHES matrix could be theoretically abstracted to a more general level, it could provide guidance for more geographic variations in research projects on internationalization.

Second, the IHES framework was developed to be applied to institutional cases, and we think that it has the potential to be applied to other dimensions, such as at the systemic level. Our data from China demonstrate the vast variations amongst institutions at the country level. The social justice, economic development, and public good outcomes and effects are not confined to the institutional level, but are enacted at the local community level, national level, and the global level. The local, regional, and global outcomes and analysis became even more complicated when involving multiple levels of actors. We recognize that the IHES framework is still in development, and that the IHES matrix could be further refined to account for differences at the local, regional, and global levels. With further refinements of the IHES matrix in future, the evaluation and discussion of social justice, economic development, and public good goals could be more complex, nuanced, and impactful.

The higher education system in China is embedded in politics and has a tradition of serving society, as seen in Confucianist values of “学而优则仕” (talents cultivated by universities shall serve public affairs) and “学以致用” (knowledge shall apply to societal use) (Marginson, 2011). Nevertheless, ISE is not an integral part of China’s national education system, so ISE is farther away from the social service function. Without connecting ISE to society, related practices and activities fall short of achieving the three core functions of higher education: education, research, and service to society (deWit, 2020; Wen & Cui, 2020).

The condition of a partially integrated international student education is a common predicament facing many emerging studying abroad destinations, particularly in non-anglophone countries, such as Japan, Korea, India, Malaysia, and Russia (Abdullah et al., 2021; Choi, 2022; Huang, 2022; Mathews, 2022; Minaeva & Prostakov, 2022). This study thus sheds lights on international student education in a global society. Although there are some achievable merits in terms of regional economic trade and cultivating human resources for Global South countries (Gu & Qiu, 2017; Ha & Chen, 2020), many other important dimensions of internationalization for society remain to be realized. For ISE to integrate well with institutions and society, the conflicts and lack of coordination between policy priorities should be reconciled. ISE is a social field involving multiple actors, including the state, institutions, and the labor market. Situated within a strong state, each actor has a priority that requires overall coordination.

Limitations and future directions

This study faces a limitation in terms of institutional representation. Although we aimed to capture the variation, the universities that responded to the survey do not fully represent China’s entire higher education system. This is one of the major limitations of conducting educational research within a vast education system, without official or specific data breakdown on international student education at each institution.
We suggest several directions for future research. Universities in the coastal regions recruit 73% of international students for profit, and it is worth examining their recruitment strategies in comparison with that of other institutions. Moreover, a few border provinces have been described as the BRI’s “quiet achievers” (Yang, 2012), meaning that they incorporate ISE into their top-level design in order to benefit local society and economy without much publicity. It would be useful to apply the IHES framework to examine specific institutional achievements in terms of economic development, social justice, and public good. Lastly, this project embarked before the pandemic and ended during the pandemic. Since then, international students and faculty members have been facing travel restrictions to study and work in China. Future studies should account for such a significant event and its impact on international student education in China concerning social justice, economic development, and public good. Researchers should also investigate post-pandemic international student flows and directions, especially in terms of how different types of governance and policies affect student decisions and choices.

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**Supplemental Material**

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

**Notes**

1. Initiated in 2013, the BRI is China’s transcontinental long-term policy and investment program that aims to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks.
2. To reflect the current geographical, economic, and BRI diplomatic influence, these sampled universities were further categorized into four geographic regions: (i) border provinces and (ii) inland provinces, (referring to the provinces that are not on the eastern coastal regions, and are less economically developed and with fewer resources), and (iii) metropolitan megacities and (iv) coastal provinces. Border provinces, such as Yunan and Guangxi, received more international students as a result of the Belt and Road Initiative. The proportions within the regions were as follows: metropolitan megacities, such as Beijing and Shanghai (32.71%), coastal provinces, that are more economically developed (30.84%), border provinces, that are BRI beneficiaries (14.02%), and inland provinces, that are less economically developed (22.43%).
3. HSK is the Chinese Proficiency Test, an international standardized exam which tests and rates Chinese language proficiency.

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