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The New Analytics-Industrial Complex in Higher Education: Data, Governance, and Power

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EDITORIAL

The New Analytics-Industrial Complex in Higher Education: Data, Governance, and Power

Chris R. Glass and Gerardo Blanco

Universities worldwide are quietly surrendering their autonomy to a handful of private data companies, creating what might be the most significant power shift in higher education's history.

At the forefront of this transformation stands Times Higher Education (THE), whose evolution from an education magazine, to a rankings organization, to a data provider and consultancy exemplifies the rise of these new data empires. Owned by European private equity firm Inflexion, it maintains over 472,694 datapoints from 2,860 institutions (2025 rankings) across 155 countries. But this massive data repository represents just one facet of THE's expanding empire.

THE, which generates USD 95.7 million in annual revenue with 315 employees, has made several strategic acquisitions to expand its capabilities across multiple domains. It recently acquired the Education World Forum (EWF), the world's largest gathering of education ministers, which hosted 120 education and skills ministers in 2023. This adds to other recent acquisitions including Inside Higher Ed (United States-based news platform) and Poets & Quants (graduate business school content platform). Through these strategic moves, THE has significantly expanded its capabilities across news coverage, data analytics, student recruitment, business education intelligence, and now ministerial-level policy engagement.

This consolidation of power is not unique to THE. The recent acquisition of HolonIQ by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) represents another landmark merger, creating an education intelligence powerhouse that serves 6,950 institutional and corporate clients. Both companies have shown remarkable growth. The combined organization represents nearly 900 employees across 15 offices worldwide, adding HolonIQ's advanced AI-powered analytics platform and impressive roster of tech giants (Apple, Google, Microsoft), financial institutions (BlackRock, Goldman Sachs), and international organizations (World Bank IFC, UNICEF, and the Gates Foundation).

The Privatization of Educational Governance: From Rankings to Regulatory Power

These mergers and acquisitions highlight how major ranking organizations like THE, QS, and Academic Rankings of World Universities (ARWU) have expanded beyond their traditional role as ranking providers to become sophisticated data analytics enterprises, offering comprehensive consulting services and maintaining vast repositories of institutional data.

Data analytics in higher education has transformed from a supplementary tool into a fundamental driver of institutional strategy, representing a significant departure from traditional models of academic governance. Universities have rapidly adopted business intelligence operations and information dashboards familiar from the private sector, while the digitalization of learning platforms and student records creates unprecedented volumes of institutional data.

This shift in governance extends beyond data companies to include traditional consulting firms, creating a powerful nexus of private sector influence over higher education. Companies like McKinsey, Deloitte, EY, KPMG, and PwC have strategically positioned themselves as architects of educational futures, publishing influential reports and frameworks on "the future of the university" that increasingly determine institutional strategy. A recent National Tertiary Education Union report revealed that of 545 positions on university governing bodies in Australia, 143 were held by corporate executives and consultants, with about 30 consultants including more than a dozen from the "big four" accounting firms (Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KPMG, and PwC). QS recently published another report, "How can higher education institutions become future-ready?" Being "future-ready" appears to involve leveraging data from QS to inform institutional decision-making about everything from resource allocation to student support services to academic program development.

This shift from academic to commercial decision-making frameworks raises fundamental questions about institutional autonomy and the nature of educational governance.

Tech Companies as Geopolitical Actors

The rise of these new big data power brokers also reflects a broader consequential and fundamental shift in geopolitical influence, with tech giants becoming increasingly powerful nonstate actors. In our new multipolar world order, these data giants have emerged as shadow regulators, wielding influence that often exceeds that of traditional state actors or academic institutions.

Consider THE's recent acquisition of the Education World Forum. This strategic move transforms THE from a mere data analytics provider into a powerful intermediary between national governments and the global education market. Similarly, when QS-

acquired HolonIQ serves both universities and tech giants like Google and Microsoft, it is not just providing analytics—it is shaping the interface between higher education and the tech industry's workforce needs.

This concentration of power has given rise to what might be termed an "analytics-industrial complex"—a self-reinforcing ecosystem where private companies simultaneously generate evaluation metrics, control marketing platforms, provide performance analytics, and shape policy discussions. The impact is clearly visible in how institutions and nations respond to ranking methodologies. When QS's 2024 rankings reduced Academic Reputation weight from 30 percent to 20 percent and introduced new employment metrics, universities quickly created dedicated employability units. Nations like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have even incorporated global rankings into national policy through initiatives like Vision 2030. A recent study in *Nature* confirms the effectiveness of such responses, showing how national higher education initiatives can improve universities' rankings by 12.1 to 17.7 places in QS and ARWU.

The implications are profound: these companies are not just measuring educational quality—they are defining it. This creates a powerful feedback loop: the same organizations that rank universities also advise them on strategy and connect them with potential students, creating an unprecedented system of private educational governance.

Navigating the New Educational Order

This dual transformation—the privatization of educational governance and the rise of tech companies as geopolitical actors—represents perhaps one of the most significant power shifts in recent history, raising fundamental questions about institutional autonomy in an age of digital empire. The emergence of data companies as powerful nonstate actors is reshaping traditional power dynamics in ways that transcend conventional nation-state boundaries.

The analytics-industrial complex has effectively achieved a form of regulatory capture over global higher education. When companies like THE simultaneously control ranking systems, provide strategic consulting, and convene education ministers, they create a self-reinforcing cycle of influence that exceeds traditional regulatory frameworks. This represents a profound shift from public to private governance, where commercial entities increasingly determine educational standards and priorities without democratic accountability.

Moreover, these educational data empires wield influence that rivals or exceeds that of national education ministries. When companies like THE can convene 120 education ministers while simultaneously controlling vast data repositories and analytics capabilities, they exercise a form of soft power traditionally reserved for state actors or intergovernmental organizations like UNESCO.

Perhaps most significantly, the analytics-industrial complex challenges fundamental assumptions about academic self-governance. Universities find themselves in an asymmetric relationship where they provide institutional data at no cost, only to become dependent on costly analytics services to interpret and utilize their own information. This raises urgent questions about how universities can preserve their essential character as institutions of knowledge creation and critical inquiry while operating within these new power structures.

These interlocking challenges point to a fundamental restructuring of power in global higher education. Commercial data enterprises now function as supranational entities, wielding influence that exceeds traditional governance structures while operating largely beyond democratic oversight. This transformation raises urgent questions about the future of institutional autonomy and academic self-governance in an age of digital empire.

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When Data Does Not Deliver: Rethinking Datafication in Global Higher Education

Janja Komljenovic

In higher education, digital data is seen as transformative, and there is an omnipresent belief in its value. However, digital data is not inherently valuable; rather, it needs to be made so. This article investigates five challenges of datafication in the sector, addressing common misconceptions. It advocates for slow and responsible data innovation to meet the sector's evolving needs.

Digital data is perceived to be valuable in contemporary economies and societies. In higher education, stakeholders believe that collecting, analyzing, structuring, managing, and using data and data outputs—such as analytics, dashboards, or scores—will improve the sector. Universities aim to make data useful and strive to become data-driven organizations in their strategic and operational activities. Educational technology (EdTech) companies strive to monetize the digital data they collect, i.e., make data economically valuable. Policy makers seek to base their decisions on real-time data. However, there are many misconceptions and challenges in realizing the data value imaginary in higher education.

In this article, five challenges of higher education datafication are identified investigating universities, EdTech start-up companies, and investors in EdTech in the United Kingdom. Datafication refers to quantifying social and natural worlds and representing them in machine-readable digital formats, often involving complexity reduction. The findings are likely applicable beyond the United Kingdom, as the investigated EdTech companies and investors work in many countries and global regions.

Data Is Not Inherently Valuable

There appears to be a consistent and omnipresent belief in data value across universities, EdTech companies, and investors in EdTech. However, this value is not really realized, at least not to the extent wished by stakeholders. Data value means different things to different stakeholders. On the one hand, universities are interested in using the value of data to enhance the student experience and the efficiency of administration processes, to personalize learning, and to automate processes. On the other hand, EdTech companies experiment with different strategies to monetize student and staff data that they collect. In both cases, making data useful and valuable proves to be hard and demands resources. Data is not inherently valuable; rather, it must be made so.

Good Data Practices Are Costly

Data processing demands technological, financial, and human resources. From the point of view of universities, data discourse promises efficiency and savings, but research points to an incredible amount of labor backing datafication. This includes academic and administration staff inputting and sorting data, testing and tweaking data outputs, changing working practices, and more. It also includes a need for new skills and jobs, such as data scientists, IT developers, project managers, and vendor managers, which also require organizational changes. Costs for digital infrastructure are rising, including moving to the Big Tech cloud infrastructure. Similarly, EdTech companies struggle with the cost of data practices, especially more sophisticated data analyses and outputs beyond descriptive statistics or simple comparisons. Moreover, should they wish to develop cross-institutional data insights, it takes about five years to develop big databases. They struggle to attract enough investment for high-quality data processes, as the return on investment is perceived to be lower in education than in other sectors.

Not All Data Is Useful

Not all data outputs are the same. Many university constituents feel that some data outputs released in EdTech products are not needed for teaching and learning. Moreover, some data outputs are not representative of what they claim to represent. In addition, not the same metric is needed to support teaching online or on-campus, yet it often feels that EdTech companies promote data outputs similarly. University constituents say that "simply because data can be collected and analyzed, it does not mean it should be." Indeed, EdTech companies often experiment with data outputs in search of finding the right recipient who is willing to pay for it. Different data outputs and metrics can be developed and promoted to various parties, which could be to the detriment of other actors. For example, a metric showing how many students accessed an assigned reading and how much time they spent on it could be promoted as a measure of academic staff performance to university leaders. But

whether student access to electronic text is, in fact, a good measure of staff performance is a different question.

Data Outputs Are Consequential

The most common way EdTech companies attempt to monetize user data is by "datafying products," i.e., integrating data outputs into products with a different primary offering. For example, a video call platform could integrate analytics of call descriptors or participant engagement in the discussion on a call. As mentioned before, different data outputs and metrics can be produced for different audiences, including actors beyond universities, such as publishers (e.g., what titles are read, to what extent, and how) and governments (e.g., what skills are present or missing in a specific population). These data outputs are performative, i.e., lead to social action and have effects. They might be consequential at the institutional level (e.g., when a university decides to intervene in a student's life based on an algorithmic score), at the commercial level (e.g., a publisher deciding which academic texts to publish based on reading statistics, which might be based on behavioral nudging), at the policy level (e.g., a government making policy decisions), and so on. Hence, it matters what kind of data outputs are constructed, by whom, with what purpose, and with what consequence.

Data Practices Are Not Democratic

Datafication of higher education is not challenging only technologically and legally, but is also a process full of contradictions and disagreements. Many individuals raise continuous concerns about data practices. Academics often see that previously established teaching and learning practices are more meaningful (e.g., close relationship between academics and students, and formative assessment) than extensive data collection and outputs (e.g., learning analytics). However, individuals raising concerns often feel accused of being against progress. If various metrics are imposed on individuals without them seeing the benefit, datafication will not reach the attempted aims. This indicates complex internal struggles and different motivations and aims regarding what kind of datafication we want, why, and how, within one institution and between institutions or systems. Without taking time for an open and democratic discussion and agreement among higher education constituents, the datafication of higher education cannot deliver on its promises.

A Way Forward

Research indicates that datafication imagined and imposed onto individual staff and students by governments, EdTech companies, or university leaders will not deliver positive outcomes. Instead, the following may bring better results. First, it is important that the business models of EdTech firms be perceived as legitimate, so that university constituents do not feel exploited. Second, there is a high appreciation of datafication to support administrative processes and efficiencies, such as saving costs for software or publishing licensing based on usage or reading trends. Promotion of data outputs or datafied products must be honest, valid, and evidenced, as well as allow variety and flexibility of use, and individual agency in usage. There must be a clear and agreed upon purpose for data outputs entering higher education systems at any level and scale. Experimentation with datafication seems useful, but it should allow rolling back if data outputs do not bring value to users. EdTech companies should work with universities respectfully and support university aims, cultures, and communities. Finally, taking time and slowing down to innovate responsibly and test products, as well as investing enough resources in good datafication, is paramount.

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National AI Security Strategies: Impacts on Universities

Chris R. Glass, Sevgi Kaya-Kaşıkcı, Eglis Chacon Camero, and Ekaterina Minaeva

National artificial intelligence (AI) strategies increasingly shape university research priorities, creating complex tensions around academic openness and institutional autonomy. Universities are navigating competing demands between international collaboration and national security.

Research universities are navigating a complex and evolving landscape of international collaboration, increasingly shaped by national artificial intelligence (AI) and technology security policies. Between 2020 and 2024, many countries launched or updated national AI strategies, explicitly tasking universities with specific roles in advancing national AI capabilities. This surge in AI-focused policies represents the latest chapter in the evolving relationship between universities and national strategic priorities—from Cold War research restrictions to post–September 11th security measures. However, the scale and scope of AI regulatory frameworks mark a distinctive shift in how governments view university research as central to national competitiveness and security.

While AI research faces the most direct scrutiny through directives like the Memorandum on Advancing the United States' Leadership in Artificial Intelligence, new security frameworks affect collaborations across fields from climate science to public health. University leaders must now systematically evaluate international partnerships against multiple risk factors—from data sensitivity to technology transfer concerns. This marks an intensification from previous decades where international academic exchange, while never entirely unrestricted, operated with greater autonomy and less formal oversight.

Research Openness and National Security

The most immediate challenge facing research universities stems from the growing tension between academic openness and national security concerns. While export controls and other regulations have existed previously, the current geopolitical environment has intensified scrutiny of international partnerships, particularly in Europe and North America.

Tensions are particularly pronounced in US–China research collaborations. The United States' China Initiative, along with evolving export controls targeting advanced computing and semiconductor technologies, has created barriers to joint projects and scholarly exchanges. Western governments have increased scrutiny of China's Digital Silk Road initiative, raising concerns about potential dual-use applications of technologies, data security, and intellectual property issues, particularly regarding projects involving companies like Huawei and ZTE in 5G network development and smart city projects.

Similar trends are evident globally. Australian universities have revised research security frameworks to align with government guidelines concerning foreign interference. Japan's increased focus on cybersecurity and the establishment of specialized offices to monitor sensitive research partnerships underscore these global shifts. These measures signal change in how universities manage international collaboration, moving toward greater risk assessment and more formalized security protocols. This evolving landscape reflects greater emphasis on navigating both the benefits and the emerging risks of international research collaboration.

Universities are adopting "managed openness" approaches to balance research collaboration with security requirements. These frameworks typically involve screening partnerships, establishing transparent data-sharing agreements, and conducting regular security audits. Data governance has emerged as a particular challenge as institutions navigate diverse regional requirements—from the European Union's GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) compliance to varying national frameworks. Successful responses generally require robust governance structures, clear evaluation protocols for international partnerships, and enhanced compliance capabilities.

Institutional Autonomy Under Pressure

The relationship between public AI funding and institutional autonomy presents a growing challenge for universities worldwide. As national governments increase their investment in AI research, they often attach conditions that align research agendas with strategic objectives, creating tension with traditional academic independence. This dynamic manifests differently across major regions, reflecting varying approaches to university governance and national priorities.

In Asia, government influence on research priorities is particularly direct. China's "New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan" exemplifies this approach, with research universities operating under explicit national directives. In India, the National AI Strategy promotes the development and application of AI across various sectors, aiming to position the country as a leader in the field; however, Institutes of Technology must balance ambitious national AI targets with growing international partnerships.

The Western approach generally preserves more institutional independence. Universities in the United States maintain significant autonomy, though federal funding requirements can indirectly influence research directions. European institutions navigate a multilayered system: while the EU's Horizon Europe program provides substantial funding, universities must comply with both European Union-wide regulations (such as GDPR and ethical AI guidelines) and member state policies, creating a complex environment for cross-border collaboration.

African universities exhibit a diversity of approaches, with some prioritizing partnerships with Western institutions, others engaging more closely with China, and still others pursuing pan-African collaborations through initiatives like the Partnership for Applied Sciences. Through initiatives like the Latin American AI Research Network, Latin American institutions are developing collaborative models that promote regional capacity building while safeguarding institutional independence. These varied approaches highlight how institutional autonomy intersects with local contexts and development priorities.

Talent Mobility and Recruitment Challenges

The intensifying global competition for AI talent presents significant recruitment and retention challenges for universities. Major research universities face difficulties maintaining international research teams due to factors like visa restrictions, security clearance requirements, and competition from industry. In some countries, national security frameworks necessitate citizenship or permanent residency for specific AI research positions, further restricting the talent pool.

These factors are reshaping global talent flows in complex ways across regions. While China invests heavily in domestic AI education, India has launched initiatives like "AI for All" and partnerships between its institutes of technology and global tech firms to build capacity. Brazil and other emerging economies are developing regional AI talent networks through initiatives like the Latin American AI Research Network. European institutions leverage programs like the European AI Fellowships, while ASEAN frameworks promote talent sharing across Southeast Asia.

However, many institutions in the Global South face persistent challenges around infrastructure, funding, and brain drain despite these regional efforts. The computing power and data infrastructure required for advanced AI research threatens to widen the divide between well-resourced universities and those in emerging economies. As revealed in UNESCO IESALC's comparative policy review, less developed countries are increasingly forced to trade market access and data resources to gain access to essential AI capabilities, potentially deepening traditional center–periphery relationships in international higher education.

The geopolitical landscape has also impacted traditional academic mobility patterns. Many leading Asian universities are focusing on building robust domestic talent pipelines through enhanced graduate programs and industry partnerships. European institutions, promoting the European Union's focus on "trustworthy AI" and ethical frameworks, aim to attract researchers who prioritize research integrity and ethical considerations.

Navigating the Complexities of "Responsible Internationalization"

The current shift toward "responsible internationalization" in research presents universities with a fundamental challenge: balancing the imperative for open scientific exchange with mounting pressure for security-conscious oversight. This tension echoes broader changes in international higher education, where the traditional emphasis on global collaboration increasingly competes with national security priorities. While the European Union's principle of "as open as possible, as closed as necessary" offers one framework, questions remain about who defines these boundaries and how they affect global knowledge production.

The implications demand concrete action from university leadership and the broader higher education community. First, university leaders and administrators, in consultation with faculty and international partners, must develop clear protocols for evaluating security risks while protecting academic freedom—moving beyond compliance to proactive governance. Second, universities should strengthen regional research networks to maintain vibrant international collaboration even as bilateral partnerships face restrictions. Third, institutions must advocate for security frameworks that address legitimate concerns without undermining essential academic values or widening global inequalities in AI research access.

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The University-Science Model and Global Megascience: 100 Years of Advancing Research

David P. Baker and Justin J.W. Powell

Global megascience highlights the transformative role of universities in driving global knowledge production through collaborative scientific networks. Rooted in the twentieth-century educational revolution and the global diffusion of the "university-science model," universities evolved into pivotal research hubs, reshaping science beyond national borders. Since 1900, expanding scientific output and cross-disciplinary collaborations have spurred discoveries and addressed global challenges, even as sustainability questions remain.

The extraordinary velocity of contemporary scientific discovery was showcased by the COVID-19 pandemic—in particular, how researchers worldwide collaborated to understand the novel coronavirus and develop vaccines rapidly. This swift acceleration of research was no isolated phenomenon; rather, it represents the culmination of decades of investment in worldwide scientific infrastructure characterized by collaborative, networked, and often cross-border research efforts—a form of scientific engagement that we refer to as "global megascience."

Our recent book, *Global Megascience: Universities, Research Collaborations, and Knowledge Production* (Stanford University Press, 2024), traces the historical evolution of a transformative idea: expanding universities and actually merging teaching and research missions toward fostering a global, highly collaborative, and unexpectedly powerful research capacity. We integrate historical narratives of twentieth-century university development with scientometric analysis based on unique data from a vast sample of the world's scientific journal papers, spanning from 1900 onward. Along the way, we explore counterfactual models, examine the ironic outcomes of excellence initiatives, and confront the major challenges threatening the sustainability of the global spread of the university-science model.

The exponential surge in research output, notably in 2023 when around four million studies were published with almost all including university-based scientists, evidences the largely university-based research capacity and collaborative potential of the international scientific community. Originating from a handful of the earliest research-active universities in 1900, these scientists have both taught and undertaken research at over 38,000 universities and other postsecondary schools educating growing proportions of the world's youth. Still far from the predicted limits to growth in science, the contemporary scientific landscape continues to flourish, fueled by an educational and cultural revolution that links higher education and science.

The Educational Revolution and Megascience

At the heart of the megascience phenomenon lies a cultural shift—the education revolution—that transformed universities from teaching institutions into centers of research, solution-seeking, and public engagement. Over the past century, the inclusion of broader segments of society in education has driven a remarkable rise in university attendance, with nearly 40 percent of young people worldwide now enrolled in postsecondary education. Combined with the extraordinary mobility of (graduate) students and growing gender equality in many fields, this democratization of access has produced generations trained in and committed to advancing scientific inquiry—and to crossing boundaries.

As universities evolved to integrate teaching and research, they prioritized research as a primary mission. This shift established universities as key sites of scientific investigation and created a forum for the free exchange of ideas across disciplines and borders, as well as the intergenerational transfer of cutting-edge knowledge.

This alignment of mass education with scientific advancement has built an unprecedented global network of research and development. Alongside the formation of national research universities, many countries now emphasize publishing cutting-edge research in specialized journals. STEMM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine) fields alone feature nearly 10,000 high-impact journals that provide access to the latest discoveries, upholding research quality and ensuring the global exchange of knowledge.

Universities Providing the Research Platform for an Era of Global Science

Universities remain central to scientific discovery, with their faculty contributing to an estimated 85 to 90 percent of the millions of scientific publications produced annually. These institutions

foster collaborations across disciplines and borders, often partnering with other research entities or industries.

The advent of the internet—a technology born in universities to enhance global research collaboration—has revolutionized international and interorganizational partnerships. Today, scientists collaborate in real time across continents, overcoming traditional geographical boundaries. This connectivity has rapidly expanded research capacity, supported by a global pool of hundreds of thousands of scientists. The growing number of active researchers, combined with technological advancements, has driven exponential growth in scientific output and enabled breakthroughs at an unprecedented pace.

While some critics describe the surge in publications as "hyperinflation," analyses suggest that it reflects a genuine expansion in research capacity rather than diminished quality. The immense growth does pose challenges, such as the need to efficiently synthesize and replicate findings across millions of publications. However, advanced artificial intelligence tools offer transformative ways to navigate these vast knowledge networks, highlighting the potential and far-reaching implications of such tools.

The Scientization of Society

A symbiosis between the ascendent education revolution and research at universities has the broad consequence of "scientizing" society, meaning the development of science's capacity to inquire into ever more aspects of human affairs, life, the planet, and the cosmos. Through the growing institutionalization of scientific endeavors, research-oriented universities worldwide have adopted a common organizational framework, spreading from Germany to North America to East Asia and everywhere else, too. As a result, universities in diverse regions have come to play similar roles in knowledge production, blending aspects of their national histories and cultures with this global model of scientific organization.

This "university-science model" has inspired countries around the world to invest in science and contribute to the global pool of knowledge, sometimes for the first time in their history. Universities in Brazil, Iran, and Turkey, for instance, now contribute to major science journals, most often in English. Even small countries, such as Luxembourg and Qatar, have made significant investments in their scientific capacity, with their research universities acting as nodes within this vast global research network. Over the past several decades research activity has grown significantly at originally low-research universities and other postsecondary schools. This activity includes a steady stream of collaborations with faculty at two-year institutions. Lastly, although basic research is also undertaken at a growing set of noneducational institutions, even these tend to collaborate heavily with university-based colleagues, tapping into university access to and leadership of global hubs of joint research.

The scope of scientific research has extended beyond traditionally strong research nations and the usual research-intensive universities as even newer research universities contribute to the growing body of scientific knowledge. The world today, as a result, is arguably richer in scientific knowledge than ever before, with universities serving as epicenters of discovery and collaboration on a global scale.

The Journey of Megascience: Global Dissemination and Local Contexts

An earlier companion book—*The Century of Science* (Powell, Baker & Fernandez 2017)—describes case studies of selected countries' capacity-building of megascience and examines how the knowledge-production systems adapted to different cultural, historical, and political contexts. The university-science model that emerged in German-speaking regions and spread to the United States is now embraced worldwide, extending from Europe to Asia and beyond. Each region has adapted parts of the model, emphasizing particular national or regional priorities and particularities, with different mixtures of public and private funding. Countries that historically lacked research infrastructure before the 1980s now contribute regularly to the global flow of scientific knowledge, underscoring the potential of higher education to support knowledge transfer and foster scientific communities worldwide.

The analysis of this global flow of scientific research offers profound insights into the collective enterprise of megascience, further illustrating a durable and influential network of discovery. Overall, the collective enterprise stands as a testament to higher education's transformative power and the ongoing relevance of universities in facilitating knowledge production.

Sustaining Megascience for the Future

Megascience represents the cumulative achievements of scientists worldwide who continue to seek answers to complex questions. Understanding its roots and trajectories allows us to appreciate its monumental accomplishments but also today's challenges—replication and synthesis of knowledge, the ethical dimensions of artificial intelligence in science, and maintenance of high research standards amid increasing output. As we navigate contemporary global challenges, from public health crises to the climate crisis, understanding the cultural and educational foundations that support megascience is essential for its sustainability. Ultimately, megascience exemplifies the potent interplay between education and scientific discovery, highlighting the pivotal role of universities in global knowledge production and the potential for continued, collaborative advancements in our collective pursuit of knowledge.

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International Research Funding in African Higher Education: Risks and Benefits

Ngenge Ransom Tanyu

Despite contradictory evidence from university rankings such as QS and *The Times Higher Education* World University Rankings, the impact of external research funding on African higher education remains an open question. While external funding provides critical financial resources, it usually has conditionalities that may undermine the autonomy and sustainability of African higher education. This article dissects its benefits and risks, with case studies from Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa, and proposes balanced funding strategies.

An analysis of the top 100 universities in Africa indicates that approximately 40 to 60 percent of their funding is sourced from outside the continent. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is one among many significant external funders of public health and agricultural research in Uganda and various other African nations. The Wellcome Trust provides grants for biomedical and public health projects, while the European Union's Horizon 2020 funds cross-disciplinary research involving African and European universities. Funding from grants and partnerships is frequently contingent upon specific deliverables and outcomes. Examples include collaborative research that requires coauthorship of publications with the expectation that researchers from the Global North will take on lead or coauthorship roles, alignment of research priorities with the strategic interests of Northern funders, publishing in high-impact journals that Southern researchers usually have difficulties accessing, and requirements of shared intellectual property. Capacity-building programs, exemplified by those funded by Erasmus+, similarly prioritize the training and reintegration of scholars into their home institutions. This trend of external funding highlights the significance of international collaboration but at the same time raises concerns about the autonomy and long-term sustainability of research agendas at African universities. What are the implications for higher education research in Africa? Can it be asserted that external funding to Africa consistently aligns with positive intentions and focuses on the continent's interests? Is external funding genuinely aligned with Africa's development and priorities? Does it enhance the autonomy of universities or reinforce a cycle of reliance? This article explores financial data from Stellenbosch University, the University of Johannesburg, the University of Nairobi, and Makerere University to explain the dynamics of external funding and its implications for higher education in Africa.

Kenya and Uganda

The University of Nairobi is known for its heavy reliance on international partnerships in terms of research funding. Key contributors include organizations like the Global Center on Adaptation (GCA), led by the University of Nairobi's chancellor Patrick Verkooijen. Professor Verkooijen is one of the architects of the Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program, which has already brought over USD 6 billion of resilient investments in Africa. While his expertise in climate adaptation is invaluable and his position as chancellor may seem strategic, his Dutch origin and international connections send a contradictory message to the African public. With this kind of external influence evident at the University of Nairobi, one may ask: At what cost do the Rockefeller Foundation, Mitsubishi Corporation, and the Chinese embassy in Kenya offer scholarships to both undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Nairobi?

Makerere University, on its part, continually strives to increase its investment in research, recognizing the critical role research plays in addressing the development needs of Uganda. Information on its website reveals that Makerere University received special funding worth 30 billion Ugandan shillings (approximately USD 8,100,000) under the Research and Innovations Fund (RIF) in the financial year 2019–2020. This initiative was the result of strategic discussions between Makerere University management and the government of Uganda, aimed at supporting high-impact research and innovations. However, the question remains whether this truly makes a difference, given that the government of Uganda itself relies heavily on foreign aid for survival. Moreover, Makerere University dedicates only 1 percent of its internal faculty-generated income to research, relying on partnerships with international development organizations such as NORAD (Norway) and Sida/SAREC (Sweden), long-lasting partners in education and research capacity building, or the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a key supporter of academic excellence and innovation in

Africa. Only one of the six projects listed on the university's website receives funding from sources within Africa. The rest are funded externally: for example, MaRCCI (Regional Centre of Excellence for Crop Improvement) is supported by a grant from the World Bank (2017–2022) and Kiira-EV. This cooperation dates back to the 2008 Vehicle Design Summit that brought together teams from 35 preeminent research universities that built a five-seater plug-in hybrid electric vehicle, The Vision 200, led by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Therefore, Makerere University is a typical example of an African university that relies heavily on external funding sources and partnerships that enhance their research capabilities but put their independence at risk.

The Situation in South Africa

In its 2023 financial report, Stellenbosch University revealed that third-stream income—predominantly sourced from external funding—contributed 1.3 billion South African rands (just under USD 70 million) to its annual research budget, accounting for 32.2 percent of the university's total recurring income. To compare: first-stream income (government subsidies) made up only 29.6 percent, while second-stream income (student fees) accounted for 22.1 percent. External funding was instrumental in financing major research infrastructure projects, such as the Biomedical Research Institute on its Tygerberg campus, valued at 1.2 billion South African rands. However, such reliance highlights the challenges of sustainability when external grants are project-specific and time-bound.

Similarly, the University of Johannesburg reported a significant influx of external research funding in 2023: The university surpassed its annual target by securing 934.2 million South African rands in research income, primarily from international sources such as the Wellcome Trust and global academic networks associated to BRICS. External funding, therefore, constituted 32.2 percent of the University of Johannesburg's income, underlining the central role of international donors in supporting cutting-edge research such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The 2024 Highlights of the Division of Global Engagement of the University of Johannesburg reveal that the university's academic services department has successfully completed fifteen agreements, including collaboration agreements with the University of Hohenheim (Germany), the University of Nova Gorica (Slovenia), the University of Helsinki (Finland), the Federal University of Bahia (Brazil), Constructor University (Germany), Malmö University (Sweden), Carleton University (Canada), University of California San Francisco (United States), the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, and the University of Cologne (Germany). However, one should bear in mind that, as history has consistently demonstrated, African universities incur significant costs when negotiating from a position of weakness.

Benefits and Challenges Posed by External Funding

External funding is essential for the advancement of research and innovation at African universities. Institutions such as Stellenbosch University and the University of Johannesburg rely on external funding to develop state-of-the-art facilities, including the Biomedical Research Institute and advanced 4IR research laboratories. Scholarships and grants have facilitated the pursuit of postgraduate studies and impactful research for thousands of African students. Collaborations with international institutions facilitate access to advanced technology, global expertise, and innovative methodologies, thereby increasing the international visibility of African research. Numerous grants focus on urgent global challenges, such as climate change, public health crises, and food security, empowering African institutions to significantly contribute to addressing these problems.

However, although external funding provides essential resources, it also presents considerable risks that could jeopardize the autonomy and sustainability of higher education in Africa. External funders frequently emphasize research topics that align first of all with their own interests, rather than those that are essential for Africa. The GCA's climate-related funding at the University of Nairobi, for instance, may detract from addressing other pressing local issues, including urban poverty and governance. External funding agreements also frequently prioritize funders regarding intellectual property rights and decision-making authority and often restrict commercializing research outputs or influencing public policy. Another aspect is the fact that grants are generally specific to particular projects and have defined timeframes, which exposes African universities to vulnerabilities upon the conclusion of funding cycles. The report from the University of Johannesburg highlights operational difficulties associated with maintaining research facilities in the absence of stable funding. Stellenbosch University's dependence on third-stream income, which constitutes 32.2 percent of its revenue, underscores the fragility of its research ecosystem. Thus, reliance on external funding renders African universities vulnerable to fluctuations in global economic conditions and funders' evolving priorities.

Toward a Balanced Funding Model

African universities should focus on developing strong internal funding mechanisms and enhancing regional collaboration to diminish reliance on external funding, while governments should allocate a greater percentage of GDP to education and research. Universities should also establish collaborations with local enterprises to broaden their funding avenues. Establishing endowment funds and using alumni support can ensure financial stability over the long term. Institutions such as Stellenbosch University and the University of Johannesburg have started exploring these avenues; however, substantial scaling is required.

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Private Higher Education: Patterns, Divergences, and Regional Trends

Daniel C. Levy

Private higher education (PHE) has grown enormously and become quite diversified. While concentrated in Asia and the Americas, PHE is nearly ubiquitous globally. This overview identifies broader PHE patterns and the chief ways that regional and country variation bend or even break from the geographically broad patterns. Striking differences persist between private and public, and new differences arise. Few key concerns in contemporary higher education can any longer be contemplated without the inclusion of PHE.

Private higher education (PHE) has grown enormously and become quite diversified in its manifestations and activities. The last redoubts of public higher education monopoly have yielded to dual-sector systems. Recent state recognition of Algerian and Greek PHE leaves Cuba as the only not-tiny higher education system without PHE. PHE accounts now for a third of worldwide higher education enrollment.

The book *A World of Private Higher Education* is this author's attempt to assess the startling rise and characteristics of PHE globally. It provides frameworks for analyzing and understanding PHE anywhere in comparative and historical perspective. It claims to identify patterns that characterize PHE broadly, including in contrast to public higher education, as well as to identify the chief ways that regional and country variation bend or even break from the geographically broad patterns.

Ubiquity does not equate to equal geographical spread. Asia alone has a majority of PHE enrollment, a larger majority than it has of total higher education. Latin America, second in PHE raw enrollment, has the largest PHE share of total enrollment, slightly over 50 percent. PHE in the United States, while now dwarfed by that of India and below the global average, remains the towering PHE giant in academic standing and international, social, economic, and political importance.

Recent decades of private growth have been concentrated heavily in developing countries, and the situation will unlikely to change—with the exception of two major developed country outliers, Japan and South Korea, where the current private enrollment constitutes roughly 80 percent and is declining. Yet, illustrating continued global vibrancy and surprises within PHE, Western Europe has seen enrollment of 12 percent and 1.6 million students in 2000 grow to nearly 20 percent and 3.8 million today.

Patterns

The significance of PHE's global surge relates to PHE's nature or, more accurately, varied natures. PHE is not a homogeneous phenomenon. Research establishes fundamental and abiding distinctiveness between private and public. Plainest in finance, the distinctiveness exists in governance and missions (or functions) as well. Thus, we can identify private-public distinctiveness in academic, cultural, social, economic, and political realms. As that distinctiveness is not always the same distinctiveness, it is important that we can now identify the principal sorts of distinctiveness found, where and when. An abiding generalization remains, however, that PHE almost always has significantly more privateness (with private stakeholders, activities, and interests) than public higher education does, while public higher education has considerably more publicness than PHE does.

To be sure, private and public often blur, either by compromises made with opponents at PHE's inception or over time. There, too, we can identify where, when, how, and why. Increased government regulation over PHE is one major source of blurring. The partial privatization of public higher education (as with increased private cost-sharing with the government) is another. At the same time, and far less appreciated, other changes within sectors *widen* the distinctiveness between sectors. Examples include the abolition of tuition at public institutions, as by the Philippines' recent populist-leftist regime or, on the PHE side, the emergence of the for-profit form.

Private-Private and Typology

A World of Private Higher Education systematically compares (a) discovered PHE reality with established public reality and (b) various manifestations of PHE to one another. Private-public and private comparisons are synergistic. Where legal for-profit private emerges alongside legal nonprofit private, as in Brazil and China,

new mixes emerge within PHE as well as consequently new comparisons between for-profit PHE and public higher education. A strong tendency is that for-profit—including in its rapidly growing online or distance form—increases the already substantially divergent patterns (e.g., program offerings, part-time versus full-time student and faculty presence, and faculty power) between PHE and public institutions.

A typology of PHE has facilitated analysis of the sector's diversification over time, evolving through empirical tracking of reality. The typology divides the private sector into subsectors of "identity," elite, and nonelite as prelude to their subdivision into types and subtypes. Religion has been the identity subsector's principal type, both historically and contemporaneously, sometimes with gender and ethnic parallels. Catholic affiliation has often been the first and/or primary religious subtype in many countries, while both Evangelical and Islamic religious PHE is presently making strides.

Outside the United States, world-class PHE has remained nearly absent and the private-public parity system non-existent, with South Korea the stunning exception. The much more widespread and fast-growing type of elite PHE is "semi-elite," elite in national context but not substantially in international context. Usually quite intertwined with business, semi-elite PHE also connects to the highest levels of the job market, the professions, and, increasingly, even political power. Academically venerable religious institutions that over time subordinate their religious mission come to resemble or even shift to semi-elite status.

By enrollment count, the non-elite subsector dominates PHE. Especially in the developing world, the latter part of the twentieth century brought a huge increase in demand for higher education that governments thought themselves incapable of financing, yet socially and politically incapable of denying, thus allowing, with whatever reluctance and trepidation, massive demand-absorbing PHE. In all geographic regions, however, we have been observing a rising share of non-elite PHE in "product-oriented" PHE, a type overwhelmingly tied to the job market. It is this growth that most accounts for the current West European surge, in critics' eyes overly substituting training for higher education, while in participants' eyes responding to the real world as public universities are too inflexible in principle or structure to do.

Policy

The expansion of PHE has been global and there are certain patterns recognizable, with national variations. Much of what happens in one era in one region then happens in another and, within regions, in country after country. But this reality of globalization reflects no global plan. Global PHE has not been created by any self-interested or ideological movement. Neither the World Bank, nor the United States, nor any intellectual planned the PHE reality. It is doubtful that any expert predicted or imagined it well.

Nor has the global spread of PHE occurred mostly through conscious emulation country by country. Where there have been international dynamics and actors, they have not been primarily governmental. PHE's spreading throughout Latin America in the middle of the twentieth century often happened against government will. Even when the cost considerations of mass demand made governments elsewhere more accepting of PHE, they were not the principal architects of it, though by the turn of the century global reality of PHE and the reduced stigma of the PHE idea in global consciousness were such as to facilitate Middle Eastern and Asian government partnership in fostering PHE.

For the most part, however, our *World of Private Higher Education* remains one built by private actors and for their own perceived self-interests. It is a world of private student and family choice, business big and small and national and international, built around single PHE institutions and chains of them, with still room for diverse religious and other nonprofit actors. It is a world largely at odds with notions that government "steering" *would* and *should* make public policy for the entirety of holistic, centrally coordinated, coherently planned, harmonious systems. *A World of Private Higher Education* depicts a global reality that is highly fragmented, as well as mostly privately constructed, for private interests.

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Private Higher Education in Africa: Roots, Trends, and Challenges

Wondwosen Tamrat and Damtew Teferra

Like the rest of the world, private higher education institutions are sprouting across the whole continent of Africa. Several factors have contributed to this growth, notwithstanding serious challenges that impinge on private growth. Examining and addressing these challenges is key to recognizing and benefitting from the sector.

The emergence and proliferation of the private higher education (PHE) sector in Africa have introduced multiple patterns in its structure, growth trajectory, and quality. African PHE has a history that spans both long-standing traditions and more recent developments. The oldest private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in the continent were religious institutions, primarily of Christian or Islamic origin. These institutions provided educational opportunities long before the introduction of modern secular education in the continent.

Gradually, religious institutions expanded their educational offerings beyond religious subjects, addressing the needs of individuals working outside the church. After independence in the 1960s, Africa's higher education system was heavily influenced by the "public-good" model, where public universities were seen as national symbols and drivers of national development and modernization. This led to limited interest in the promotion of private higher education providers.

However, this trend started to shift in the 1970s and 1980s. Several factors contributed to the change, including massive enrollment at school level, limited capacity and accessibility of the public higher education sector, frequent strikes and instabilities in public universities, reduced public spending in higher education, and the rise of neoliberal ideology, alongside pressures from external organizations like the World Bank.

Typology

The share of overall PHE enrollment in Africa currently stands at 18 percent, significantly lower than the global average of 33 percent. This suggests that higher education in Africa has largely remained a public enterprise.

Indeed, private enrollment is declining in countries like Egypt and Ghana, driven by challenges such as negative perceptions, high tuition fees, a decline in international students, especially from neighboring countries, and issues with quality, inflation, and increasing competition from the public sector.

A variety of PHEIs operate across the continent. One prominent category is religious institutions. These hold significant influence in countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. While they often operate as nonprofit entities, this distinction is becoming increasingly blurred as the cost of education at these institutions can be on par with or even exceed that of for-profit private universities.

Elite private universities also exist in Africa, albeit on a limited scale. Examples include semi-elite universities in Egypt, Kenya, and South Africa that offer high-quality programs, employ high-caliber faculty, amass substantial resources, and emphasize student-centered pedagogies and continuous assessment.

The most common and "demand-absorbing" institutions include for-profit PHEIs owned by individual proprietors, family businesses, corporate organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and foreign entities collaborating with local institutions. Family-owned private universities are a relatively recent but growing phenomenon in many parts of Africa.

Most private institutions focus on programs in social sciences, humanities, and arts, with a strong preference for business, management, education, and theology, as opposed to STEM, vocational, and agricultural subjects. While some countries permit PHEIs to offer a full range of programs, others, such as Egypt, Ethiopia, and Ghana, restrict private universities to offering only bachelor and master programs.

In some countries, private institutions are also differentiated based on their designation. In Kenya, PHEIs can use the title "university," while in South Africa, they are designated as "university colleges" due to their limited research activities. Consistent with international trends, private institutions in Africa are seldom engaged in research and produce limited research output.

Public Policy Toward PHE

Legal provisions for the establishment and operation of PHEIs vary across the continent. In some countries, such as Ethiopia, a single

authority is primarily responsible for accreditation and external quality assurance, while in other countries, like Egypt, these responsibilities are shared among multiple bodies in a coordinated manner.

In Ethiopia, the accreditation process is strictly enforced on PHEIs, while the dominant public sector is not held to the same standards, creating double standards within the system. Ghana has a unique requirement for newly established private institutions: they must affiliate with a chartered public institution before being granted their own presidential charter.

Most PHEIs across the continent rarely receive government funding or subsidies. In many cases, tuition fees and internally generated revenue are the major sources of income for private universities. In countries like Ethiopia and South Africa, students enrolled in private institutions are not eligible for government financial support. However, there are exceptions, for example in Kenya, where government loan schemes made available for students in the public sector are extended to those in private institutions.

Challenges

PHEIs have been a valuable addition to the African higher education landscape by providing alternative pathways and contributing to the continent's developmental goals. They play a crucial role in broadening access, choices, and opportunities for students and graduates, offering diverse study options that align with their future aspirations.

However, PHE is not just about expanding access. It also provides conducive learning environments and program diversification, fosters competition within the higher education sector, and generates employment and income. PHEIs are sometimes preferred over public institutions due to their unique features, such as enhanced monitoring of student progress, immunity from the frequent strikes that disrupt public institutions, and improved opportunities for interaction between students and staff.

While public institutions are known for being rigid and bureaucratic, successful PHEIs are often dynamic, efficient, and flexible. Due to their need to achieve social and economic success, they minimize wastage, promote strategic positioning, focus on employment-oriented training and job-placement services, and ensure greater internal accountability. The presence of a vibrant private sector can encourage intersectoral competition and cooperation, leading to a more efficient and responsive public system.

Nevertheless, African PHEIs remain limited in scope, size, and growth due to several bottlenecks. These include the absence of comprehensive national policies, limited funding, exclusion from government support, negative perceptions, low enrollment rates, and difficulties in attracting physical and human resources. Internal management issues, such as weak governance and management structures and role conflicts among individual owners, often hinder the effective delivery of high-quality teaching and learning.

PHEIs are also affected by restrictive regulations, constantly changing requirements, uncertain procedures, delays in accreditation, double standards in the accreditation of private and public universities, and limited capacity to enforce rules and regulations. These issues are common across the African PHE scene and pose significant obstacles to its development.

Future Pathways

Addressing the future of PHEIs in Africa requires tackling the various challenges and concerns raised by governments and relevant stakeholders. It is crucial for PHEIs to foster positive perceptions and build confidence in the sector. This can be achieved by emphasizing the value of the diverse and competitive programs they offer, rather than relying solely on the quasi-market attitudes and practices with which they are often associated.

Creating a robust knowledge base about the current state of the African PHE landscape is also of utmost importance. A deeper understanding of this sector is necessary to inform better policy making, planning, and decision-making. The sector must evolve into a field of inquiry where its future direction is guided by knowledge and improved understanding, rather than personal preferences, whims, or purely commercial intentions.

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Private Higher Education in Kazakhstan: 30 Years of Growth and Regulation

Amina Shaldarbekova

Private institutions are a major provider of higher education in Kazakhstan. The country has the most privatized higher education system among all the post-Soviet countries. This article discusses how both the state and the market have contributed to the private sector's growth.

Private higher education (PHE) has become an integral part of the higher education landscape in Kazakhstan. As in many post-Soviet countries, it emerged in the early 1990s following the demise of the Soviet Union. In fact, the sector marked its 30 years of development in 2023, and presents a unique case compared to other countries in the region. Though the rapid growth of private institutions could be witnessed in the 1990s across all the post-Soviet space, at present, Kazakhstan remains the only country with a strong PHE sector. The nonstate sector is the leader in Kazakhstan, both in terms of institutions and enrollments. In other post-Soviet countries, with the exception of Armenia and Georgia, public institutions outnumber private institutions, with private enrollments not surpassing 40 percent of total higher education enrollment in the region (as of 2023). Thus, Kazakhstan has become the sole country in the region where private institutions are the main provider of higher education. The article sheds light on the expansion of PHE in Kazakhstan and seeks to provide some explanation for it.

Background

In Kazakhstan, PHE was permitted by the 1993 law on higher education. Soon afterward, the first group of nonstate institutions appeared. Parallel with the majority of the former Soviet countries, there were few monitoring mechanisms at first (or none at all). Consequently, a weak legal base and the new socioeconomic realities (mostly economic decline) of the 1990s, coupled with the previous monopolistic higher education background, laid a fertile ground for the instant proliferation of PHE. As a result, by 1997, there already were 71 private institutions in Kazakhstan versus 62 public universities, and the numbers continued to grow. It was also in sync with private enrollment, which soared in a short time.

In the mid-2000s, the private sector reached its peak in absolute terms, and prevailed over the public sector both in the numbers of institutions and students. It is worth mentioning that the characteristics of Kazakh private institutions were no different from elsewhere: small in size, low academic standards, weak resources, low cost, and with a lack of permanent teaching staff. This dubious growth soon raised concerns. It was followed by a period of decline, which was primarily caused by delayed state regulation (as could also be observed elsewhere). By the late 2000s, many private institutions ceased to exist, as they were either closed or merged with others. Government regulation also tightened the conditions for establishing new ones. Yet, the sector continued to dominate in the system. According to the data of the Bureau for National Statistics, in 2023, 59.8 percent out of 112 higher education institutions were private and accommodated 54.2 percent of the country's 592,700 students. Analysis reveals that, in the Kazakhstani case, both the state and the market have fueled the private sector growth.

The Role of the State

In Kazakhstan, PHE has been developing in the context of ongoing higher education reforms. Since its emergence, the sector has been evolving against the backdrop of building a national higher education system, which prioritizes the public sector, along with the changing socioeconomic conditions in the country. Public higher education itself, based on the Soviet model, has undergone several phases of transformation: from introducing neoliberal reforms to joining the Bologna Process. The private sector had to fit into the changing environment. There is no denying that, to a certain extent, some of these changes were initiated to curb private growth. Yet, the state also played a crucial role in legitimizing PHE. In the early 2000s, the government imposed a uniform legal and regulatory framework for both the public and private sectors. Accordingly, private institutions were subject to licensing, attestation, and accreditation procedures. On the one hand, this allowed the government to control the private sector. On the other hand, nonstate institutions benefited from the regulation, as it ensured that they maintained an acceptable level of quality. Therefore, despite wide criticism, private alternatives continued to function in large numbers, thanks to the regulatory infrastructure produced by state agencies.

Another policy of core importance was the state recognition of private institutions' credentials. In Kazakhstan, under the traditional higher education model, the ministry of education and science awarded degree certificates (commonly referred to as "diplomas") to all higher education graduates. With the 1999 law on education, the right to grant a uniform state diploma was also

extended to the nonstate sector, and the situation remained so until 2021. In the historically state-monopolized higher education, the emergence of degree-awarding private institutions alongside public universities, no doubt, attracted students. In this sense, there is a clear connection between private sector expansion and its degree-granting power. The private sector's degree-granting entitlement may, to some extent, be a starting point and a cause for its growth in the region.

Growth can also be explained by the privatization of some state universities. In 2000, the government proposed the full or partial privatization of a group of public higher education institutions. Over the years, two became totally private, while eight others were reorganized as joint stock companies with about 20-35 percent of the shares belonging to the state. The remaining shares were owned by private investors. However, by 2021, these were also sold to private entities. Eventually all of these institutions became completely privatized. This also led to the increase of private universities and their enrollment numbers.

The Role of the Market

Growth of the private sector was also, to a large degree, driven by demand in the market. The rapid expansion—at least in numbers—illustrates that private institutions have great support in the educational market, despite being at a disadvantage in competition with the public sector. There are quality and stability concerns, which means that there is no guarantee of private institutions' long-term functioning. Nevertheless, PHE remains an attractive choice because private institutions provide higher education qualifications with minimal entrance requirements and at a low cost. Initially, an increase in students was associated with the increased access to education, including for previously underrepresented groups. The mode of study was another moving force in capturing more students. In the 2000s, up to 50 percent of all the private sector students were enrolled in part-time programs. Moreover, from the beginning, the newly established private institutions offered and still offer popular market-oriented programs. Since public universities enroll a big share of students on a fee-paying basis, but charge much more than the majority of private institutions, PHE has become an available alternative for many young people from lower-income families. The market also contributed to the differentiation among private institutions, as a result of better access to education. Thus, there are a few private institutions that meet the needs of those who are ready to pay higher tuition fees.

Current Dynamics and Prospects

The recent decades have seen the private sector gain dominance and diversity. But the majority of institutions still remain at the lower end of the higher education hierarchy. Only a small group of private universities have achieved a relatively solid position and managed to become highly competitive on the national level. Furthermore, controversial views toward the sector have not disappeared; rather, various stakeholders, including the public, have begun to understand the differences between private institutions. Overall, the current dynamics within PHE indicates that the private share of higher education will remain high in Kazakhstan both in terms of the number of institutions and students. Yet, the number of institutions is unlikely to grow again as it did in the 2000s. On the contrary, the sector may shrink over time at the expense of institutions with demand-absorbing characteristics, as observed in recent years. Meanwhile, those that remain are likely to expand in size and keep serving the needs of different groups of clients.

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Chinese Private Higher Education Under Pressure: Quality, Policy, and Demographic Decline

Cassidy Gong

Situated at the bottom of the echelon in the highly stratified Chinese higher education system, private higher education (PHE) faces existing challenges while being confronted with new uncertainties that threaten its survival. This article discusses the persistent quality improvement challenge and an increasingly volatile policy environment that Chinese PHE faces.

China, with the world's largest higher education system, has the third largest private sector, enrolling over five million students at more than 700 private higher education institutions (PHEIs). With more than a 60.2 percent gross enrollment rate, Chinese higher education has turned from an elite system to a universal one within a remarkable 20-year period. During the process of system expansion, PHE was encouraged by the government to play a demand-absorbing role in providing tertiary education opportunities for students that scored the lowest in the universal college entrance examination. PHE enrolls a quarter of all postsecondary students today and is still associated with low quality, while credentials from private colleges are discriminated against on the labor market. Public policy toward PHE has become increasingly volatile, particularly regarding the separation of for-profit and nonprofit PHE registration. With the economic slowdown—especially since the COVID-19 pandemic and demographic decline—Chinese PHEIs are confronted with many uncertainties ahead.

Challenges for Quality Improvement

The efforts to improve quality for most Chinese PHEIs are perpetuated in a vicious cycle ascribable to their tuition-dependent nature, the low *gaokao* scores of the students, and the inability to recruit and retain high-quality faculty. PHE's reliance on tuition, often as the only source of income, limits their program offerings to low-cost applied ones such as business, foreign languages, and information technology. Consequently, tuition fees at PHEIs are on average three times higher than at their public counterparts. Students at PHEIs pay a lot, yet their return on investment in terms of postgraduate employability is significantly lower. It is estimated that the graduate employment rate of public higher education institutions is 50 percent higher than at PHEIs. Public sector students score, on average, 51 points higher in universal examinations than PHEI students, reflecting the difference of competencies among young people at the point of entry into postsecondary education. Yet, the fact that families are willing to pay a high premium for low-quality higher education is attributed to the strong value of educational achievement, being a code of honor in Confucian heritage societies.

The challenge for PHE to recruit and retain top-notch faculty restricts the quality of program delivery and overall institutional improvement. PHEIs continue to rely on hiring retired public university faculty as senior administrators and lecturers. This practice gives PHE the benefit of experience and expertise that these people bring, yet an overreliance on retired public sector faculty also creates concerns, including a lack of creativity and inability to stay up-to-date with new curricula and pedagogy. It also creates an isomorphic effect of curriculum design in program delivery between private and public higher education institutions, which contradicts PHEIs' efforts to be unique and niche-seeking, compared to public higher education. Young academics prefer to work in public higher education institutions even with lower pay, and those who start their academic careers at PHEIs leave for public higher education positions as soon as those become available. Working for the public sector in China is associated with better job security, a wider range of benefits, higher pension, and higher prestige. Government and industry research funding initiatives do not explicitly exclude PHE, but it is well-known that most government-funded research projects are awarded to elite public universities. PHEIs aspire to produce research, yet budget restraints mean that faculty are burdened with heavy teaching loads and left with no time for research activities.

Volatile Policy Environment

Statistics show that 30 percent of Chinese PHEIs are family-owned, and another 30 percent are private enterprise–owned (the remaining 40 percent are philanthropy-founded or owned by state enterprises or public universities). An estimated 80 percent of Chinese PHEIs are founded with the intention to generate and

distribute profits despite their legal designation as nonprofits. Among the family- and private enterprise-owned, many had invested resources for over two generations in founding and developing their PHEIs. Policy ambiguity and resulting confusion around profit-making led to the government issuing its post-2010 policies, which included the order that all PHEIs had to choose, by 2021, whether to be for-profit or nonprofit. Since then, 24 institutions (or 3 percent of the total) have become legally registered as for-profit PHEIs, enrolling approximately 4 percent of PHE students. These new for-profit PHEIs either belong to an education corporation or have a state-owned enterprise involved in their structure. This slow increase in for-profit PHE is surprising as originally about a half of existing PHEIs had a clear intention to register as for-profit. Despite worries, such as the obligation to pay for a re-evaluation for the land they own, fixed capital, and taxation according to enterprise law, many PHEIs wanted to have their land ownership legally protected and to have their capital assets administered under enterprise law. According to the 2020 Chinese civil code, a for-profit legal entity had the right to distribute profit and to designate inheritance should the institution close (rights denied to nonprofits). In contrast, choosing nonprofit status would mean coming back to a form which lacked clarity or prior policy experience in communist China.

Yet, in reality, PHEIs learned that it was not only a matter of making a choice. Most of the institutions that had indicated their desire to register as for-profit had their applications denied. Complicating the situation further, it was generally the *provincial* government education bureaus that refused their applications, commonly demonstrating that, while the national guidelines did formally offer a for-profit option, they lacked any details on implementation, a possible signal that the national government did not truly support for-profit PHE after all.

After the upheaval caused by the government's unclear efforts to distinguish nonprofit and for-profit institutions, uncertainty grew even further, as the PHE sector faced another major change: Hundreds of private colleges affiliated with public universities had to become freestanding, merge into public institutions, or close. Those that opted to become freestanding faced stringent rules and high costs, and were not allowed to register as for-profit, likely because of the complex public-private partnerships and resource-sharing during their founding phase. So, the Chinese government policy on PHEIs has left the majority of PHEIs still searching for ways to make and distribute profits, even while not declaring themselves for-profit. In fact, the lines between nonprofit and for-profit are further blurred, as some provinces have decided to charge nonprofit PHEIs a 25 percent enterprise tax on their tuition and residence fees.

Conclusion

Trapped in a vicious circle of challenges for quality improvement while having to navigate a volatile policy environment, PHE faces yet another threat to its survival—the demographic decline resulting from China's one-child policy that was strictly enforced between 1979–2013. Many private primary and secondary schools in Beijing and Shanghai are closing. In 2024, for the first time, many PHEIs could not recruit enough students to fill the enrollment quota designated by the government. Combined with a slowing economy, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, the future of Chinese PHE is uncertain.

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Brazil's Private Higher Education: Equity and Distance Learning

Flavio Carvalhaes and Simon Schwartzman

This study explores the complexities of Brazil's higher education system, characterized by the dominance of private, for-profit institutions, the expansion of distance education, and persistent challenges in ensuring quality and equity. We analyze the historical and political factors that have shaped this landscape and discuss their implications for public policy, particularly in the context of the Lula administration.

Brazil's higher education system is dominated by private institutions, which account for approximately 80 percent of total enrollments. The philanthropic sector has been reduced to a few religious and community-based institutions, while the for-profit sector is dominated by a small group of large teaching conglomerates with shares listed in stock exchanges. As of 2023, 10 companies enrolled about 37 percent of the country's total enrollments, providing mostly low-cost distance education. Data on total and new enrollments in in-person and distance education—42 percent and 58 percent, respectively—indicate that the prevalence of distance education is growing.

Historical Context and Comparison with Latin America

The presence of private higher education in Brazil is not a recent development. The current trend was set in the 1960s when legislation established that higher education should be provided through selective universities staffed by full-time, research-oriented academics. Only the federal government and a few rich states, such as São Paulo, could meet these standards. As Brazil transitioned from elite to mass higher education, public institutions proved too expensive and restrictive to accommodate the rising demand, opening the door for private institutions to expand. This differed from the experience of most Latin American countries, where public universities were accessible to most students who completed secondary education, and massive private expansion would follow.

The Lula and Bolsonaro Years

In the 1990s, under president Cardoso, the Brazilian government decided to allow private higher education to operate as for-profit institutions, creating a market in which richer and more efficient institutions could buy the smaller ones. Historically, the Workers Party under presidents Lula and Rousseff (2003–2018) had strong support in public universities and looked at the private sector with mistrust. However, one of the priorities of the Lula government was to expand access to higher education, which could be better done through the private sector. Two instruments were used for that: the "University for All" program (ProUni), which granted tax exemptions to private institutions in exchange for student fellowships; and a lenient student loans program (FIES) that, at the height of its implementation in 2014, paid the tuition of about 40 percent of students entering private higher education. Efforts were also made to create new federal universities and expand access to existing ones, but these had a much smaller impact.

To deal with social inequity in the public sector, new legislation passed in 2012 required federal universities to reserve 50 percent of their vacancies for affirmative action students. The percentage of nonwhite ("pretos" and "pardos") students increased in the first period from 22 percent to 50 percent, with more than 60 percent of the students coming from public schools (a proxy for low-income students).

All policies aimed at expanding public resources were impacted by the economic crisis that began in 2015, which strained the federal budget. The student loan program faced severe cuts, prompting the private sector to shift investments toward distance education. Additionally, the anticipated investments for continuing the expansion of federal universities failed to materialize.

Jair Bolsonaro was elected in 2022 with a right-wing, libertarian platform focused on criticizing public sector corruption, advocating free markets, and promoting conservative values. He and his supporters viewed the scientific community and public universities as influenced by left-wing ideologies. During the pandemic, his government adopted an antiscientific stance, resisting vaccine rollout and opposing social isolation measures implemented by state governments. Public universities faced budget cuts that impacted salaries and routine operations.

Upon taking office in 2023, Lula's administration focused on several key priorities reminiscent of his previous terms: financing,

expansion, equity of access, and regulation. He also dealt with graduate education and research issues.

Financing and University Autonomy

Federal universities make up 13 percent of total enrollments. The 121 institutions cost about USD 9 billion a year. The total budget of the ministry of education is equivalent to USD 24 billion. Most of these resources—80 to 90 percent—are used to pay salaries and retirement entitlements to the university's academic and administrative staff, who enjoy job stability. Current expenses account for another 10 to 15 percent, leaving little room for investments. The new government succeeded in securing funding for salaries and routine maintenance but not for investments or salary increases, leading to a prolonged strike in 2023 by university staff and professors in most campuses.

Brazilian law grants universities autonomy, yet public institutions remain tightly controlled by the government regarding resource access and management. Proposals to make them more autonomous and accountable for their results, however, face resistance from within the academic community, which fears that such innovations could lead to privatization.

Enrollment rates in Brazilian higher education are still low by international standards, with recent growth due mostly to private distance education. Yet, in 2024, the government decided not to allow the creation of new distance education programs. The long-term effectiveness of this measure is uncertain, and the government is suffering from legal and political pressure to establish clear standards to serve as a reference for the operation of this type of educational service.

The New Elite Private Institutions

The financial travails of federal universities and changes in the social composition of their student body opened the space for the establishment of a new, small segment of elite institutions, particularly in business administration, economics, engineering, and medicine. Some of these institutions are philanthropic, rely on support from the business sector, and combine expensive tuition fees and fellowships for talented applicants. Belatedly, Brazil follows the experience of many other Latin American countries, in which the private sector caters to elites, leaving the public sector for the larger and poorer sectors of the population.

Graduate Education and Research

Brazil stands out in the region due to its large graduate education and research sector, primarily housed within public universities. In 2013, nearly 400,000 master and doctoral students were enrolled in close to 5,000 programs, all tuition-free, with many receiving fellowships. Many of these programs are also prominent research centers. Additionally, an estimated 1.5 million students are enrolled in unregulated, postgraduate programs at private institutions, which primarily focus on professional training or skill development, such as MBAs.

Conclusion

Brazil's heavily private system of higher education highlights complex interactions between market incentives, regulations, and technological innovation. The future remains uncertain, as the government grapples with the challenges of improving distance education quality, maintaining equity policies, and balancing public and private sector roles. Whether stakeholders, especially the federal government, will succeed in addressing these issues and ensuring a well-regulated system that serves the needs of students and society remains unclear.

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Digital Transformation and Growth in Germany's Private Higher Education

Isak Frumin and Alexander Kalgin

Private higher education in Germany is growing despite demographic challenges. This article examines the sector's expansion, which is strongly driven by digitalization. Private institutions actively implement online education and use artificial intelligence, leveraging technology to improve efficiency and reduce costs of provision. The importance of universities of applied sciences focused on career-oriented programs is growing, too. Germany's predominantly public higher education landscape is being reshaped in the context of dramatic technological change.

Describing the market of private higher education in Germany in 2022, Barbara Kehm wrote the following in IHE #109: "The majority of private institutions are considered too small, too specialized, and often too mediocre to merit much public attention. Thus, the sector does not really present a competition or a threat to the public sector." While we agree that the private sector is not directly competing with the public sector of the higher education system, one can observe that the landscape is changing. Private higher education is growing and becoming an important part of the higher education system. How can this happen in a predominantly public system in the context of a declining number of school graduates? We try to answer this question below.

Growth of PHE

Europe's population is one of the oldest in the world and is aging further. This trend is also visible in Germany. The current number of young people in Germany is at a historic low. Since the first census in 1950, the proportion of 15–24-year-olds has never been as low as it is now. For comparison: in 1984, young people represented 16.7 percent of the population of West Germany; by 2023, the share of young people in a united Germany had dropped to 10 percent.

One might expect to see an impact on higher education enrollment. However, there was no decline in enrollment in higher education institutions (HEIs) until very recently (total enrollment peaked in 2020 at 2.94 million and declined slightly to 2.87 million in 2024). What is interesting is an analysis of where this decline actually occurred. Between 2019 and 2024, enrollment in public HEIs declined from 2.59 million to 2.46 million, whereas private enrollment grew from 246,000 to 372,000. Private higher education (PHE), which only had 39,000 students in 2004, has been demonstrating steady growth. Today, 13 percent of all tertiary students in Germany attend private HEIs (compared to 8.5 percent in 2015). What is remarkable is that PHE has grown even in the context of negative demographic trends. Thus, private higher education is not only increasing its share of the pie but is also making the pie bigger.

Some private HEIs are growing into mega-universities: the largest university of applied sciences (UAS) in Germany is now a private institution (IU Hochschule, with over 130,000 students), followed by FOM Hochschule, another private UAS with over 50,000 students. Hochschulkompass.de, the official German online platform providing information about universities and study programs in the country, reports that as of 2024, there were 275 public and 110 private HEIs in Germany.

The private higher education sector in Germany has a relatively short history, as public institutions dominated the country's higher education system until the establishment of the first officially recognized private university, Witten/Herdecke University, in 1983. To understand this history, one has to remember that the German higher education system comprises three main types of institutions, categorized by their focus and educational approaches: traditional universities (*Universitäten*), universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*), and colleges of arts and music (*Kunst- und Musikhochschulen*). Universities are also sometimes referred to as "research universities" or "full universities." During the last decades, the importance of public UASs in German higher education has been growing. Many of them now offer graduate programs. The same is true about private UASs. Most private HEIs today are actually UASs (Hochschulkompass.de reports that there are 83 private UASs and 21 private universities).

Compared to public universities, private universities' share in the fields of economics, law, and social sciences is very large (69 percent compared to 34 percent at public HEIs in terms of enrollment numbers), whereas natural sciences (13 percent versus 41 percent, respectively) and humanities (0.7 percent versus 13 percent, respectively) are much less represented.

Germany has a very small sector of elite research-intensive private HEIs, comprising three "comprehensive" research universities (Constructor University, Zeppelin University, and Witten/Herdecke University) and a small number of specialized HEIs. Even private "full" universities, with very few exceptions, are not competing with the public "full" universities in terms of research (publications and grants). The majority of private institutions could be described as primarily "career-oriented."

Most private universities operate as nonprofit organizations. At the same time, the importance of for-profit private HEIs and their students is growing (for example, IU Hochschule, with over 130,000 students, is for-profit). This fact looks even more surprising in the context of a strong social belief in free higher education in German society.

New Entrants

So, who are the students enrolled in private HEIs? One of the answers is international students. Most English-language undergraduate programs in Germany are offered by private HEIs (to compare: private HEIs offer 31 programs taught in English, while public HEIs offer 25 such programs).

However, a significant share of students comes from the domestic population. This means that new groups are entering higher education. One such group is first-generation students whose parents did not have a chance to get tertiary education. This expanding group faces unique challenges in adapting to university life, as they are often less academically prepared than those entering more traditional public HEIs in Germany. As the size of the potential student pool declines and tertiary education expands due to continuing massification (the share of people with tertiary education among those aged 25–64 grew from 28.6 percent in 2017 to 33.3 percent in 2023, according to OECD data), universities increasingly recruit from less academically prepared groups to maintain enrollment numbers.

Digitalization as a Tool to Increase Efficiency

With a student body entering with lower academic preparedness and facing various challenges in adjusting to university life, private universities are facing a serious challenge: The "marginal cost" of educating students is rising, driving up the costs for higher education institutions and potentially jeopardizing the quality of higher education provision.

The main answer to this challenge is online delivery and digitalization. Private universities are significantly more active in offering online programs and are using digital technologies to improve quality, increase efficiency, and reduce costs.

In total, private HEIs offer 770 online programs, while public HEIs offer only 288. Of all online programs, 56 are taught in English and 1001 in German. In the public sector, 105 online programs are offered by universities and 179 by UASs. In the private sector, almost all online programs (767 out of 770) are offered by UASs.

Analysis of the universities' websites and news publications also confirms that the majority of private HEIs are interested in driving down the costs of teaching and utilizing economies of scale provided by new technologies (online learning, digital resources, artificial intelligence (AI)).

The example of IU Hochschule, the largest German university of applied sciences, is illustrative: The institution has demonstrated rapid growth in enrollment (from just 300 students in 2012 to over 130,000 students in 2024) by actively implementing AI and online learning. IU Hochschule claims, for instance, that Syntea, the HEI's AI-driven teaching assistant, offers personalized interaction, enabling students to ask study-related questions anytime and receive immediate feedback.

To conclude, we can say that, in Germany, private higher education not only absorbs the demand that exists due to massification, but also opens new opportunities for students and does so while reducing the average cost of education by actively engaging with distance learning and AI.

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Shifting Winds: Mobility Trends Among Indian and Chinese Students

Leah Mason and Mirka Martel

This article examines the changing enrollment patterns of international students from leading senders China and India to host destinations around the world. Using data from the past decade, we offer a divergent picture of the priorities of these students and the implications for policies and academic mobility.

The pace of international student mobility has begun to increase once again following the COVID-19 pandemic, and, according to UNESCO, will reach 10 million international students by the end of 2030. The largest sending countries, China and India, comprise more than a quarter of all international students worldwide, and forecasts continue to place these two at the forefront of academic exchange.

What can we learn about the past to inform patterns in the future? Since 2001, the Institute of International Education's *Project Atlas* has collected comparable international educational mobility data from over 30 partners, mapping the global flows of students. Throughout this time, China has been the leading sender of international students.

In 2024, India became the top sender of international students. While this trend was anticipated, given the unprecedented rise of Indian students pursuing graduate studies and the COVID-19 ramifications on students from China, it ushers in a possible new phase of international student mobility.

One important consideration is that the profile of Chinese and Indian students differs considerably, influencing everything from where to what these students want to study. By studying historical trends of global enrollment in these two countries, stakeholders can better prepare for the student profile of the next decade.

Chinese Student Enrollment Trends

The number of Chinese students studying abroad has been in decline for several years already, and has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. At its peak in 2020, 11 Project Atlas partners reported that nearly one million Chinese students were studying in their countries. In 2024, 16 Project Atlas partners reported that this total had decreased to just under 847,000 students. The rate of decline occurred across top host destinations, most notably in the United States and Canada.

One-third (277,398) of these students studied in the United States. This represented a 4 percent decline from the prior year and a drop of approximately 100,000 students from 2020. The United Kingdom and Australia were the second and third leading host destinations, with 154,260 students and 142,420 students, respectively.

In the United States, the slowdown in Chinese students began before the COVID-19 pandemic and has accelerated since. During the 2010s, a large growth in the number of Chinese students to the United States was attributed to undergraduate degree seekers, and the recent decrease has been among this demographic primarily. While numbers of Chinese graduate students have rebounded, the number of Chinese undergraduate students has been decreasing.

Given that the tertiary system in China has been developing its own capacity to support domestic and international students, alongside an overall shrinking demographic trend of tertiary-aged Chinese students, the number of undergraduate students from China who go abroad may not reach heights seen in the past. What remains to be seen is whether graduate student numbers will continue to grow and whether the combination could propel total Chinese student numbers upward again.

Indian Student Enrollment Trends

The increase in the number of Indian students seeking higher education abroad has been driven by mobility to three global hosts: Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Canada, the leading destination for students from India, hosted 384,965 students in 2024, a 33 percent increase from the prior year, and a 94 percent growth since 2020. Similarly, the United States hosted 332,217 Indian students at the tertiary level, 24 percent more than the preceding year, and the United Kingdom hosted 173,190 students, a 42 percent increase. Of the more than one million Indian students who studied abroad, 86 percent chose one of these three destinations.

India's climb to the leading sending country of international students results from a rapid surge in the number of students who studied abroad between 2020 and 2024, nearly doubling in this short time frame. Students from India studied at all academic levels, with just under half enrolled at the undergraduate level and slightly more than half enrolled at the graduate level.

Compared to China, these proportions differed significantly across host countries. For example, in the United States and the United Kingdom, the majority (more than 80 percent) of Indian students enrolled at the graduate level, while in Canada, more than 90 percent of Indian students enrolled at the undergraduate level.

With an increasing tertiary population, there is room to recruit a greater number of international students from India. However, the preferences of students vary. Most Indian students who preferred to study abroad at undergraduate level went to Canada, where vocational and technical education degree programs are part of the undergraduate tuition model for international students, making them more accessible and affordable. This has also been bolstered by Canada's immigration policies and pathways to employment.

Many graduate students going to the United Kingdom or the United States had completed their undergraduate studies in India before pursuing study abroad. This indicates that the population of students going to Canada differs from the population of students interested in studying in the United Kingdom or the United States.

Implications for Future India and China Student Flows

Although the COVID-19 pandemic affected all countries, responses to the pandemic and reengagement with student mobility have differed globally. In the Chinese context, students who have returned home are now filling roles at higher education institutions and contributing to expanding Chinese university capacity. An increasing number of Chinese universities are now highly ranked in global university rankings, offering Chinese families an opportunity to reconsider the need to go abroad. At the same time, China emerged slowly from the COVID-19 pandemic, and an economic downturn in the country has kept unemployment rates high among college graduates, particularly those with advanced degrees. This has resulted in Chinese students reassessing the value of an advanced degree and overseas options for study or work.

The growing youth population in India and limited higher education capacity, alongside increasing income levels of the middle class, are the primary factors leading to many Indian students crossing the border to pursue higher education. As Canada and other countries impose restrictions on international student mobility, it is valid to question whether the same students who would have considered Canada for their undergraduate study, for example, could turn their sights to the United Kingdom or the United States. The results could benefit these two hosts, but the data also indicates that the profile differs. There is also the question of whether Chinese and Indian students may look to other destinations, perhaps regionally in Asia, to pursue their studies.

Student mobility trends emerging in China and India continue to reinforce the need for higher education institutions to focus their outreach and recruitment strategies on both while offering programs that complement the shifting dynamics of their student profiles.

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It Is Time to Talk About Visa Fraud. Again.

Allan E. Goodman

Visa fraud has been a serious problem in international student recruitment for many decades already. The increase in international student mobility and the use of agents and new technologies exacerbate the problem and require joint actions to combat this fraud in the interest of ethical policies for international student recruitment, in the United States and elsewhere.

Last year, a student at a prestigious university in the United States posted an essay on social media with the following title: "I have built my career and life on lies." He then proceeded to describe a recipe for success involving "a very structured fraud plan" involving fake documents and signature stamps from officials in his home country that enabled him to gain admission and scholarships. He was arrested shortly after the essay appeared on Reddit, pled guilty, was expelled and then deported. What is the lesson learned other than that one should avoid posting about such things on social media?

Visa Fraud Is Not a New Problem

Over the past decade, there have been several federal cases settled for multimillion-dollar damages and fines paid by North American and foreign companies for fraud and abuse of the H1B visa system in the United States, as well as for the use of student visas for human trafficking. The higher education press has increasingly reported on cases of "ghost students" who never show up or do so only to transfer to another school where classes are minimal and work opportunities plentiful. When admissions officers analyze such absentee trends, some conclude that a notable number of international applications from certain places may have been fraudulent.

Visa fraud is not a new phenomenon or a new challenge. In 1921, the Institute of International Education (IIE) reached an agreement with the Commissioner of Immigration of the United States to do an annual census of international students coming to the country—a country that had no visa provision for nonimmigrants at the time. In exchange for allowing foreign students and scholars to leave Ellis Island despite the nationality quotas and waiting lists, IIE was employed by the Consular Service to help the United States diplomats read foreign transcripts and applications. This relationship emerged because consular officers were seeing rising numbers of applications from students wishing to attend colleges in the United States with which officials were unfamiliar, and they were having difficulty reading foreign transcripts, making it hard to determine legitimacy.

Then as now, there were professionals who specialized in forging documents and assisting, for a fee, any person who sought to come to the United States to work instead of enrolling in academic degree programs. In several countries, IIE has been faced with applications of high quality and seemingly genuine letters of admission produced by street vendors and "licensed agents." When asked at their visa interviews why they had chosen the field listed on their application, students assisted by such agents were often unable to answer because they had never read what was submitted in their name.

Are We Headed into a Perfect Storm?

Fraud has also gotten very sophisticated and organized. Some prospective applicants are being targeted by criminals who, masquerading as government officials from various ministries, are reaching out to their parents, expressing that they have learned of a student's plans and are requiring that they subscribe to a special service to review and process an application. In some places, visa appointment "brokers" book all visa interview appointments and then sell the time slots when students learn that they cannot be interviewed until long after the academic term has started. Loan sharks and diploma mills collaborate as bad actors and then threaten indebted students with exposure of false credentials to employers unless more debt is taken on.

International recruitment agents are now used by nearly 70 percent of colleges and universities in the United States. Some of these agents are unscrupulous. Estimates range from one-fifth to one-third of agent-supplied applicants from some countries failing to show up or doing so with documents that falsify their previous academic records and performance.

All of these scams and document production processes are greatly enhanced by AI, which is outpacing the capacity of admission officers to detect its use. The effect is to harm the chances of those doing it right.

The website of the United States' State Department contains a page devoted to passport and visa fraud that begins by noting that "passport and visa crime" has been a problem since 1916. "Common types of fraud" are enumerated, including "presenting false

documents to apply for a visa" and "misrepresenting the reasons for seeking a visa."

In the overall number of visa denials reported annually by the State Department, the number of cases of suspected fraud is not given. However, when asked, consular officers most frequently respond with "at least half.".

It Is Critical for Higher Education to Be Proactive

With United States consular sections around the world prioritizing student visa appointments and issuing record numbers of student visas, it is important for higher education officials to actively join the battle against fraud. Experienced and well-resourced institutions should join forces to share best practices for combating fraud with less experienced institutions. Higher education actors should be constantly educating students and parents about what to look for in unscrupulous agents, confronting challenges posed by applications being processed, and insisting that student applications consist entirely of the applicant's own work. Also, they should use social media to tell the stories of the wide range of international applicants who apply without fraud, are admitted, and successfully secure visas.

As major international education, advising, enrollment management, and admissions organizations continue to work together to attract international students to higher education, it is also essential for them to lead a united effort to help combat visa fraud. Step one requires understanding the scale, contours, and seriousness of the threat—a working group from among these organizations should be established to do so. In the process, they can also begin distilling the lessons learned in the ChatGPT era about how to effectively combat something that should have no place in the admissions process or at the visa interview window.

The visa fraud problem is not unique to the United States. Similar issues are present in other countries, including Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, all of which also use recruiting agents and encounter similar unethical practices on a regular basis. Sharing such experiences and working together to combat visa fraud and set common ethical standards is important. The Institute of International Education has an international network of organizations involved in international student mobility and recruitment, and will act together with organizations, both within the United States and globally, to address this problem in the interest of the millions of students who aspire to study abroad.

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The Dangers of Dismantling Internationalization

Hans de Wit

In the late 1980s, internationalization moved from being marginal, ad hoc, and fragmented to becoming a more integrated and strategic part of higher education. Around the turn of the century, a shift took place away from the traditional collaborative focus on internationalization toward more competitive and market-oriented approaches. Currently, geopolitical tensions and nationalism appear to challenge both the traditional and neoliberal internationalization policies. Are we undoing internationalization?

Looking at the current debate taking place in high-income countries about higher education and its international dimensions, one wonders if 50 years of internationalization in higher education have come to an end, with examples including discussions on caps on international student admissions, a sharpened focus on knowledge security, and attacks on academics and institutions collaborating with certain countries. Are we undoing internationalization?

This question was the theme of a recent webinar on November 27, 2024, by the Centre for Higher Education Studies at University College London and the Centre for Higher Education Transformations at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom. It addressed an issue one can look at from different angles: nationalism and anti-internationalism, national security, marketization and competition, and social responsibility. A lot has happened over the past 50 years, and, in the current complex global environment, it is important to look both backward and forward at the evolution of the internationalization of higher education for possible signs of its decline and transformation.

From Optimism to Neoliberalism

In the late 1980s, internationalization moved from being a marginal, ad hoc, and fragmented list of activities to becoming a more integrated and strategic part of the higher education agenda in high-income countries.

It was a period of hope and optimism, in which collaboration, exchange, and solidarity prevailed, although marketization and competition were already present in key Anglophone countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom. The fall of the Iron Curtain, the European programs for education and research, and the need for knowledge creation and collaboration as part of the globalization process inspired higher education institutions in their efforts to become more international.

However, around the turn of the century, a shift took place away from these traditional collaborative values toward more competitive and market-oriented approaches. Neoliberalism became the driving rationale for internationalization in the Global North, with mid- and low-income countries in the Global South being primary targets.

There certainly were counter-reactions, such as the "internationalization at home" movement in Europe, the call for "internationalization of the curriculum" in Australia and the United Kingdom, the appeal for a more "comprehensive internationalization" in the United States, and the urge to decolonize higher education and its internationalization in the Global South. But the impact of these initiatives was—and still is—rather marginal; they are more rhetoric than reality. Rankings, government policies and revenue generation, and intensifying marketization and competition have become drivers of internationalization.

The COVID-19 pandemic did not provide any respite from these developments. When it subsided, education in the Global North returned to "normal" as soon as possible. In the Global South, one could see two approaches to internationalization: on the one hand, the institutional-level development of their own vision of internationalization with an emphasis on regional collaboration, a decolonized curriculum, and digitalization (collaborative online international learning and virtual exchange), and on the other, national-level policies focused on student recruitment, soft power development, and transnational education.

Internationalization Dismantled

Currently, geopolitical tensions and conflicts, anti-immigration and anti-Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) sentiments and policies, and nationalism appear to challenge the return to the "old normal" of neoliberal internationalization. There are all kinds of signals that high-income countries are now turning away from

competition and marketization: curbing or freezing admission of international students, emphasizing knowledge security, and putting an end to research collaboration and exchanges with countries like China, Iran, Russia and others.

This undoing of internationalization is becoming even more critical. Election results in the United States, as well as in several European countries, signal a dismantling of internationalization in these countries. Clear examples of deconstruction include the actions by governments in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom to reduce the number of international students, as well as the policies of the European Union and of several national governments when it comes to strengthening knowledge security, or what is referred to as "responsible internationalization" (in which "responsible" no longer means "responsible for the global society"—the SDGs—but "responsible for our security").

A Radical Undoing

This "undoing" of internationalization in the Global North, understood by some as an "undoing" of neoliberalism, does not mean a return to the traditional values of cooperation, exchange, and solidarity. It is a move toward a radical undoing of all internationalization of higher education. This is remarkable, as it goes hand in hand with budget cuts in higher education and research as well as shortages in the skilled labor market and, as such, is counterproductive. Although one can question the intentions of several governments in the Global South, the opposite seems to be happening there compared to the Global North, with the development of internationalization concepts and policies that are no longer dependent on the Global North but rather competing with it.

Internationalization cannot be seen separately from what is happening to higher education currently. Philip Altbach and I wrote in *University World News*: "The global higher education and research community, in particular its leadership, has to be aware of the challenges it faces from the current political shift to the right and needs to act responsibly in addressing them and finding ways to overcome them. This is in its own interest, but, more than that, it is in the interest of the global society. Burying our heads in the sand is a dangerous stance to adopt, in 2025 and in the years to come." That is true for higher education in general, but certainly also for its internationalization. Current developments give the higher education community an opportunity and a requirement to reassess and reimagine internationalization as being composed of socially responsible and inclusive actions, both in the Global North and the Global South. Undoing is not the solution but the problem.

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ACADEMIC PUBLISHING ETHICS AND TRENDS

Mapping (but Not Solving) the Science Communication Crisis

Philip G. Altbach and Hans de Wit

The dramatic expansion of higher education and research has meant that publications have expanded exponentially. They have become the coin of the realm for academic advancement, university prestige, and global rankings. New technologies, multinational publishers, and open access arrangements have led to an expansion that is essentially destroying the traditional publishing system and creating an insurmountable crisis in scientific communication. This analysis provides a roadmap of the crisis, but no clear solutions.

Scientific communication has never been more important—or more troubled. In an era of global science, with the multinational scientific development of COVID-19 vaccines as but one impressive example, the ability to quickly evaluate and communicate science and scholarship is critical.

The dramatic expansion of higher education and research in the past half a century has meant that research publications have expanded exponentially, and publication has become the coin of the realm for academic advancement, university prestige, and influential global rankings.

The scope of the academic enterprise is immense. Approximately 200 million students study in 26,000 universities and many other postsecondary institutions worldwide. More than 10 million academics serve this huge system.

Perhaps 10,000 of these universities are "comprehensive" and likely have some research mission. While the number of truly "research-intensive" institutions is much smaller, and most quality research productivity is from this small number of universities, total academic output is much broader and bigger.

Pushed by the emphasis in the global rankings on research, among other factors, the pressure to produce publishable articles has dramatically increased. A shift from monographs and books toward multiauthored journal articles has happened over the past 50 years. We are entering a new era, made possible by new technologies, multinational publishers, and new open-access arrangements between the higher education sector and the publishing industry. The resulting exponential expansion in the number of articles and books has essentially destroyed the traditional publishing system and created an insurmountable crisis in scientific communication.

At the same time, there is a strong call for open access and open science in response to the financial and exclusive dominance of the publishing industry. This analysis provides a roadmap of the crisis but no clear solutions.

Unsustainable Expansion

No one really knows how many scientific publications are published each year or how many journals exist. Scopus, a major index of academic journals, includes 22,794 active titles from 11,678 publishers. Forty languages are included. The other major indexer, Web of Science, includes more than 14,400 journals in its three main databases, plus an additional 7,800 journals in its emerging list.

One open-access publisher, MDPI, based in Switzerland and founded in 1996, has published one million articles since its establishment, including 295,186 peer-reviewed articles in 2022 in its 403 journals. As an open-access publisher, MDPI charges a transaction fee of approximately USD 2,000 per article.

The journal production industry has become more diverse, with a mix of traditional academic publishers (including nonprofit university presses and commercial publishers such as Taylor & Francis and Springer, and many new entries), a rise in predatory publishers, and a range of others like MDPI in between.

The pressure for open access has not challenged the dominance of the main academic publishers, predominantly located in high-income countries and publishing in English. The editors, editorial boards, and reviewers are still mainly from these countries and are mostly men, although this is gradually changing.The pressure for scientific communication and publication is increasingly coming from middle- and low-income countries. Furthermore, the academic promotion system has become ever more competitive and demands a high number of publications, often without regard to quality. As a result, many scholars and researchers, especially young ones, have no other choice than to look for alternative publication

options, such as MDPI, and predatory journals of poor quality, with higher personal costs.

Book Publishing

Over the past 50 years, the importance of academic book publishing has been diminished by the dominance of academic journals. But books remain important in some disciplines and have seen a change as well.

Originally, books were predominantly monographs by single authors, but, first in the hard sciences and then in the social sciences, and more recently in the humanities (according to Albert N. Greco's "Scholarly Publishing in the Humanities, 2000-2024: Marketing and Communications Challenges and Opportunities"), the emphasis has moved to focusing on multiauthored books: conference proceedings, handbooks, and textbooks for teaching.

Print-on-demand, e-book options, and other technological innovations have made it less expensive and more attractive to publish books. Further, it is now possible to purchase individual chapters and not an entire book, creating further income streams for publishers. This has led to a lack of coherence in many multiauthored books. To reduce costs, publishers skimp on peer-reviewing as well as on editing, which is generally outsourced to low-quality companies in India and elsewhere.

In an effort to reduce costs to the absolute minimum, quality at all levels is sacrificed. In some ways, many books are now more similar to journal issues, as they have little coherence.

At the same time, the prices for academic books and individual chapters from many publishers are extraordinarily high, often even for e-books, putting books and chapters beyond the ability of individuals to purchase, and creating severe affordability problems for libraries and institutions in the Global South, even when discounts are offered.

Increased Competition

A significant cause of these dilemmas is the dramatic growth in the numbers of (often substandard) articles and books. Why? Increased competition in the academic profession and the desire of many universities to join the ranks of research-focused institutions—when, in fact, they should first and foremost focus on teaching and community service—has placed an unnecessary premium on publication.

As a result, huge pressures are placed on the entire publishing apparatus. The open access movement is in itself highly complex and has, in some ways, created as many problems as it has tried to solve. The goal, of course, is to make knowledge freely available to all, and there are indeed several positive cases of institutions, research funders, editorial boards, and other agencies that try to address the crisis and develop alternative models.

A recent report by the International Association of Universities (AIU), "Open Science: The Challenge for Universities," correctly places the crisis in scientific communication in the context of universities "facing numerous pressures spanning from political interference, digital transformation, environmental challenges, funding cuts, decolonisation processes, to the repercussions of the increasing commodification of higher education." It asks whether universities perceive the open science movement "as a transformative opportunity for higher education to collectively address current inequities and collaborate around a shared set of principles to make knowledge a global common good."

Certainly, the trend seems to be moving in the opposite direction. Many journals and publishers have moved from subscription-based economics to charging fees to authors. And some journals and publishers simply publish anything, bypassing peer review and flooding the market with substandard material.

No Easy Answers

This discussion has only scratched the surface of an immensely complex set of challenges. For example, who "owns" knowledge? Those who produce it, or multinational or other publishers? Should English continue to be the global language of science and scholarship? How, in this context, can research and publication focusing on local themes in local languages be encouraged and respected?

There are few answers and the challenges are many, as the IAU report concludes, but the range of topics involved requires careful attention from the higher education community.

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The Influence of Chinese Social Sciences: Publication, Collaboration, and Citation Trends

Márton Demeter, Manuel Goyanes, Gergő Háló and Xin Xu

The internationalization of Chinese social sciences is explored through publication, collaboration, and citation trends in the fields of economics, education, and political science. Analysis of 8,962 Scopus-indexed publications from 2016 to 2020 highlights global impact, disciplinary silos, and "Westernization" in research practices.

As China rises as a global economic and technological superpower, its increasing prominence in international academic research has also become a subject of interest. While Chinese contributions to scientific fields such as engineering, medicine, and technology are widely acknowledged, the internationalization of social sciences in China has been comparatively underexplored. This study examines the evolving trends in the internationalization of Chinese social sciences, focusing on three key disciplines: economics, education, and political science. Drawing on a dataset of 8,962 Scopus-indexed publications from 2016 to 2020, the analysis explores patterns of publication, citation, and international collaboration within the context of China's growing academic influence on the global stage.

The internationalization of Chinese social sciences can be understood through three interconnected dimensions: publication trends, collaboration networks, and citation practices. Over the past few decades, Chinese social science scholars have increasingly engaged with global research communities, yet these fields continue to grapple with challenges related to academic visibility, intellectual isolation, and tensions between domestic policy priorities and global academic standards.

Publication Trends and Disciplinary Dynamics

Among the three disciplines analyzed, economics stands out as the most internationally integrated, with Chinese scholars publishing in prominent global journals and collaborating extensively with international peers. This trend is particularly evident in the high citation rates and increasing visibility of Chinese economists in global academic circles. The discipline's alignment with global research priorities, particularly in areas such as macroeconomics, international trade, and development economics, has facilitated stronger connections with leading international institutions and researchers.

In contrast, education and political science have shown more limited internationalization, with scholars often publishing in domestic Chinese journals or in international journals with a primary focus on China-specific issues. The publication landscape for Chinese education scholars is heavily shaped by national policy agendas, with research frequently oriented toward addressing China's domestic educational needs, rather than contributing to broader global debates on educational theory and practice. This narrow focus limits the international influence of Chinese research in the field.

Political science remains the most insular of the three disciplines. Research in this area is often oriented around issues specific to China's political system, domestic governance, and policy concerns. While the number of political science publications from China has been growing in global journals, these works typically address topics that are of more limited interest to global audiences, such as China's domestic political landscape, the Chinese Communist Party's policies, and state–society relations. As a result, Chinese political science scholars face challenges in gaining recognition within the global academic community, particularly in regions where political and social contexts differ significantly from those in China.

Citation Trends and Global Impact

Citation patterns offer another lens through which to examine the internationalization of Chinese social sciences. Economics leads the way in citation rates, with Chinese scholars in the field often cited by both domestic and international researchers. This high citation impact reflects the global relevance of their research, which addresses pressing issues such as economic growth, income inequality, and climate change, topics of wide interest across the academic community. The influence of Chinese economics research is further bolstered by the presence of Chinese scholars in key international institutions and journals, where they contribute to global discussions on economic policy and development.

Education and political science, however, show more modest citation trends, particularly in international contexts. Chinese researchers in education are frequently cited within China but have relatively low citation rates abroad, indicating that their work is less

integrated into global scholarly debates. Similarly, in political science, while some research on China's political system has gained international attention, most citations are by other Chinese scholars or scholars from other parts of Asia, rather than by Western or global researchers. This suggests that, despite increasing publication numbers, the global impact of Chinese research in education and political science remains constrained by its domestic focus.

Collaboration Networks and Geopolitical Influences

International collaboration is another critical dimension of the internationalization process. Research collaborations between Chinese scholars and those from other countries have expanded considerably over the past decade. However, the extent and nature of these collaborations vary significantly across disciplines.

In economics, Chinese scholars have established extensive international networks, collaborating with scholars from other Asian countries, Europe, and the United States. These collaborations have resulted in more coauthored papers in top-tier international journals and have enhanced the visibility of Chinese research globally.

However, Western institutions tend to play a dominant role in these collaboration networks due to the historical dominance of Western universities and journals in shaping global research agendas and standards. The widespread influence of English-language publishing and the prevalence of Western research funding have further contributed to the prominence of Western scholars in Chinese social science collaborations. This "Westernization" of Chinese social science research has led to a growing concern that Chinese social sciences will become overly influenced by Western academic traditions and methodologies, thus potentially leading to the loss of unique Chinese perspectives and the continued dominance of Western academic traditions and methodologies. This dynamic may contribute to the marginalization of Chinese scholarship that does not conform to Western norms, particularly in disciplines such as political science, where research that is more critical of Western ideologies may be less likely to find a place in international journals.

One possible source of hope is the fact that other disciplines, such as education and political science, tend to see more regional collaboration, particularly with other Asian countries. Chinese scholars in these fields often collaborate with researchers from neighboring countries with similar educational and political systems, such as Japan and South Korea. This can support the development of uniquely Asian social science. However, these collaborations, while valuable, do not offer the same level of global exposure as those in economics, which are more heavily concentrated in the Western academic world.

"International in Format, National in Essence"

One of the central findings of this study is the tension between the format and substance of Chinese social science research. While many Chinese scholars publish in internationally recognized journals and follow global academic conventions in terms of citation styles, structure, and research methodology, the content of their research often remains primarily focused on national issues and local contexts. This "international in format, national in essence" phenomenon reflects China's ongoing efforts to modernize its academic institutions and align with global research standards, while still prioritizing domestic concerns that align with state-driven agendas.

In economics, this phenomenon is less pronounced. In contrast, education and political science are more deeply entrenched in national priorities, and their research often remains more oriented toward addressing domestic policy needs or contributing to understanding China's unique political system.

Balancing Global Standards with Local Priorities

The internationalization of Chinese social sciences is a complex and evolving process that is shaped by a range of factors, including publication trends, citation patterns, collaboration networks, and geopolitical influences. The challenges they face reflect broader structural issues, such as the dominance of Western research paradigms, the prioritization of domestic agendas, and the limited scope of international collaborations.

As China continues to strengthen its position as a global research power, its social sciences must navigate a delicate balancing act, aligning with global academic standards while maintaining their unique intellectual traditions and contributing to global scholarly debates. This will require greater investment in fostering diverse and equitable academic collaborations, promoting intellectual exchange with non-Western countries, and addressing the barriers that currently hinder the international visibility of Chinese social sciences.

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Predatory Publishing: Drivers, Consequences, and Ethical Dilemmas

Johann Mouton and Marthie van Niekerk

The term "predatory publishing" refers to the exploitative and deceptive nature of predatory journals that are published for profit with no regard for academic scholarship. This article discusses the growth and drivers of predatory publishing, and the impact thereof on higher education internationally.

Despite the widespread belief—and perhaps hope—that academics generally behave ethically when publishing the results of their research and scholarship to wider audiences, various forms of unethical and fraudulent publication behavior have manifested themselves over the years. The norm of "disinterestedness" described by sociologist Robert Merton in 1942 expresses the idea that scientists should work only for the benefit of science. Commitment to this ideal would rule out the pursuit of research for other goals such as personal enrichment, self-promotion, or personal influence.

Unfortunately, as many studies have shown, not all scientists and academics necessarily subscribe to these norms. Various manifestations contrary to these ideals are well-documented in publication practices such as plagiarism and self-plagiarism, institutionalized bias against women authors in scholarly publishing, the gaming of peer-review practices through fake reviewers and reviews, use of ghost authors and—our focus—the advent of predatory publishing in academia.

The paper reconstructs the genesis and development of predatory publishing, discusses the main drivers behind this development, and concludes with some observations about its wider impact in higher education.

Origins and Subsequent Developments

The term "predatory publishing" is usually attributed to Jeffrey Beall, a librarian formerly at the University of Colorado in Denver, United States. He coined the term "predatory" in 2010, and the same year established a website and blog, which earned him the reputation as the unofficial "watchdog" of predatory publishing. He took down the website in 2017 due to personal threats that he had been receiving. Beall's lists have been archived by an anonymous contributor, while companies such as Cabells continue to document what they deem to be predatory publishers and journals.

In a more systematic publication on the topic published in *Nature* in 2012, Beall provided a more formal description of what is meant by predatory publishing: "Then came predatory publishers, which publish counterfeit journals to exploit the open-access model in which the author pays. These predatory publishers are dishonest and lack transparency. They aim to dupe researchers, especially those inexperienced in scholarly communication. They set up websites that closely resemble those of legitimate online publishers and publish journals of questionable and downright low quality. Many purport to be headquartered in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada or Australia but really hail from India, Nigeria or Pakistan. Some predatory publishers spam researchers, soliciting manuscripts but failing to mention the required author fee."

Beall's pioneering work triggered a burgeoning worldwide scholarship on the meaning and prevalence of predatory publishing. Much of this work can be seen as an extension of Beall's attempts to describe the scientific and geographical extent of "predatory" publishing. Despite this, for a long time no consensus definition of the key characteristics of a predatory journal was available.

In April 2019, the Canadian Centre for Journalology convened a global Predatory Journals Summit. A consensus definition was drafted by academics and practitioners attending the summit and was subsequently published in *Nature*: "Predatory journals and publishers are entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices."

This definition captures most of the main characteristics of "predatory" highlighted by previous authors: the fact that such journals prioritize financial profit at the expense of scholarship; typically falsify or misrepresent information and key metrics about their journals; do not adhere to good editorial/publications practices; lack transparency in business practices. This definition provides a firm basis to inform current and future debates about what we mean when we use the term "predatory."

The Main Causes and Drivers

There appear to be two main drivers that led to the widespread prevalence of predatory and other questionable publication practices in modern-day academics.

The first relates to the opportunities for fraudulent and unethical practices that became possible through digital publishing in the 1990s as well as the subsequent open access (OA) movement. It has become much easier to misuse the scholarly publishing system for one's own self-interest and profit. It is *not* that the emergence of open access directly resulted in the appearance of predatory publishers or journals, but it certainly provided the material opportunities to do so. All or most of the characteristics of "predatory" discussed in this paper, such as the creation of fake journals, fake metrics, fake websites and editorial boards, and so on, have only become possible because of the internet and the subsequent migration from print to electronic journals.

The co-occurrence of the OA movement and predatory publishing does not by itself explain the speed and increasing geographical footprint of such questionable publishing practices. The second driver that clearly underpins and continues to fuel such practices is found in a culture of performance management that pervades every aspect of our academic culture. This is not merely the reintroduction of an older form of the "publish or perish" culture that has been around for decades but is the widespread expansion of new public management ideas in the form of new metrics for academic performance appraisal. James Wilsdon referred to this in 2015 as "the metric tide" at universities. In essence, the issue is about the convergence of earlier forms of managerialism at postsecondary institutions with more recent developments in bibliometrics and altmetrics, as well as the inappropriate application of metrics such as the journal impact factor (JIF) and the h-index in hiring and promotion of academic staff.

Academic performance or success is regularly equated with some score or metric, more specifically, with metrics that prioritize counts, outputs, and numbers. Qualitative aspects of academic work, which cannot be reduced to simple measures such as publication counts, h-indices, or JIF, are conveniently ignored.

In a study conducted in 2018 by the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST), South African academics were asked to list the factors that they believe are most relevant to them when appointed on tenure or promoted. Perhaps not surprisingly, the three highest-rated reasons by the respondents were: publishing in journals indexed in either the Web of Science or Scopus; supervising and "delivering" postgraduate students; and publishing in high-impact journals. It was equally interesting that doing community engagement and providing service to the university were the lowest-rated factors!

The Impact of Predatory Publishing

When the impact of the OA movement is combined with an academic culture that prioritizes quantitative metrics, and incentive schemes are introduced that reward academics for publishing as many articles as possible with no consideration of quality or integrity, it is not surprising that the good intentions of such incentives lead to perverse consequences.

Where it becomes clear that academics at certain universities consistently engage in unscrupulous forms of unethical research and publication practices—whether these are predatory publishing, the deliberate pursuit of publication and citation cartels, assignment of fake authorship, or otherwise—the reputation of these universities will increasingly become tainted. Furthermore, tolerance toward such practices by university management will lead to an erosion of trust in the standing and reputation of the university, not only by the rest of academia but also by other stakeholders (alumni, funders) and ultimately the general public. Unless academics remain vigilant about these kinds of behavior and act decisively to root them out, public confidence and trust in science will wane to the long-term detriment of the scientific enterprise.

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Student Loans or Taxes? Financing Reform in Chile

Mario Alarcón and José Joaquín Brunner

The Chilean idea to transition from a student loan system to a progressive graduate tax represents a significant development in the financing of higher education. Though designed to reduce student debt and promote equity, this reform prompts concerns regarding institutional autonomy, financial sustainability, and redistribution of costs. We examine the implications of the proposed Higher Education Fund (FES), situating Chile's experience within the context of global debates on access, cost, and quality in higher education.

In 2018, Chile enacted a landmark higher education reform through Law 21.091, which significantly restructured the regulatory and institutional framework, quality assurance, and financing. At the heart of the reform was a gradual shift from private to public spending, establishing limited free education as the cornerstone of student financing. These changes underscored the increased role of the state as the primary regulator, evaluator, and investor in the system.

In 2024, the government introduced a new bill with the intention of reforming the existing student loan system. The proposal aims to align the funding model with the principles introduced in 2018 by replacing traditional student loans with a progressive tax on graduates' income. Nevertheless, this proposal has given rise to considerable public and political debate concerning its feasibility and implications for Chile's higher education system. This article presents a critical assessment of the potential impact of this reform and its broader implications for the system's sustainability. Concurrently, this contribution aligns with the global discourse on student finance, offering insights into the design of systems that effectively reconcile the inherent tensions within the triangle of access, cost, and quality.

The Student Loan System and Its Legitimacy Crisis

Chile has one of the highest participation rates in terms of higher education in the world, above the OECD average. This achievement is largely attributed to the *Crédito con Aval del Estado* (CAE), a loan system introduced in 2006 that allows students to finance their education through loans guaranteed by the state. According to the official data of the Chilean government, the program has already facilitated access for more than 1.2 million students, benefiting in particular low- and middle-income families attending private institutions.

Initially, the CAE imposed restrictive conditions, such as interest rates of nearly 8 percent. Over time, these conditions were relaxed, with interest rates reduced to 2 percent, payments capped at 10 percent of monthly income, and repayment periods ranging from five to 20 years. However, student protests in 2011 highlighted the shortcomings of the system, particularly the heavy debt burden on families. The protests catalyzed policy changes, introducing free education for 60 percent of the most vulnerable students during the administration of president Michelle Bachelet in 2018.

Despite this, the CAE remained for students who did not qualify for free education. By 2023, 27 percent of borrowers were studying or in a grace period, while the remaining 73 percent—about 896,000 people—were in the repayment phase. Among graduates, 78 percent had completed their studies, while 22 percent had not. The average monthly payment was about USD 34, with debts ranging from USD 3,288 for dropouts to USD 6,780 for graduates.

Although amendments improved the terms of the CAE, its association with student debt, the involvement of private banks as intermediaries, and the high costs for the government due to the involvement of private banks continued to fuel criticism. Public discourse increasingly framed the system as unsustainable, reinforcing calls for a model that eliminates debt as a mechanism for financing higher education.

The proposed *Fondo para la Educación Superior* (FES): A Critical Analysis

The proposed *Fondo para la Educación Superior* ("Higher Education Fund" in Spanish) represents one of the most ambitious reforms in Chilean higher education. It proposes to replace traditional student loans with a progressive graduate tax based on income. Graduates earning more than USD 515 per month would pay marginal rates of up to 15 percent, capped at 8 percent of income above USD 3,090 for a maximum of 20 years. By eliminating loans, the FES aims to

reduce the financial burden on students and families while redistributing the costs of higher education more equitably.

However, there are significant challenges to this proposal. The FES's reliance on government funding raises concerns about the autonomy of higher education institutions. Eliminating cost-sharing and introducing regulated fees could make universities more dependent on government funding, exposing them to budget fluctuations and government policy priorities. This dependence risks undermining institutional diversity and self-governance, which are crucial to meeting the diverse needs of academic and social communities.

The financial sustainability of institutions also remains in question. Experience with free tuition policies has shown that centrally set fees often underestimate real costs, forcing universities to operate on tight margins. It is estimated that the current free tuition model results in annual revenue losses of around USD 110 million, with the FES potentially contributing an additional USD 70 million deficit. Such constraints could affect the ability of institutions to maintain quality standards and respond to growing academic demands.

The FES's income-based contribution model introduces further complications, including potential inequalities among beneficiaries and disincentives for high-earning professionals. This unprecedented "professional tax" could be perceived as burdensome and push graduates toward private funding alternatives or tax evasion. The redistributive basis of the system, which relies on higher earners subsidizing lower earners, faces economic and political risks that could jeopardize its long-term fiscal sustainability.

Future Considerations and Challenges

Chile is at a critical juncture in the design of public policies for higher education and research. A clear, strategic vision is essential to align institutional capacity with national priorities and to ensure the inclusiveness, quality, and sustainability of the system.

Higher education must be seen not only as a mechanism for equitable access, but also as a cornerstone for the generation of advanced human capital and knowledge. A national strategy is needed to integrate these objectives and articulate the institutional role in promoting societal progress. At the same time, funding frameworks need to balance demand- and supply-side considerations. While student-centered initiatives such as FES promote access, they risk undermining institutional viability if they diverge from the realities of operating costs. A dual approach is needed to ensure equitable access without compromising educational quality.

So far, there is no solid technical basis for the proposal to replace the student loan system with a professional tax and by limiting private contributions. Rather, the proposed reform seems to respond to an ideological opposition to student debt through the logic of cost-sharing. In the short term, however, the implementation of the FES would mean a significant reduction in revenue for both state and private universities, with the latter being the most affected. In the medium term, the system could experience a decline in quality and level of activity, as there is no guarantee that the public sector will be able to compensate for the deterioration in the private sector.

It is imperative that the government reaffirms its commitment to ensuring equitable access to higher education while adopting a more pragmatic and flexible approach to the mechanisms for achieving this goal. This entails acknowledging educational loans as a legitimate instrument, one that can incorporate principles of solidarity and progressivity, and contemplating private copayments as a supplementary source of financing. For a developing country like Chile, a cost-sharing model would enable the country not only to enhance access to higher education but also to reallocate public resources to the most vulnerable groups and to strategic areas for national development.

Funding for research and development requires special attention. Chile's investment in this area, at just 0.3 percent of GDP, is well below the OECD average. Addressing this underfunding is essential to strengthen universities as centers of innovation and long-term knowledge production.

Preserving institutional autonomy is another key challenge. Increased reliance on public funding requires safeguards for the independence of universities. Institutions must retain control over their resources, priorities, and governance to adapt to changing academic and societal needs. Achieving this balance requires transparent and accountable funding mechanisms.

Finally, funding reforms must be designed as part of a comprehensive development strategy. Without this alignment, policy inconsistencies could undermine long-term goals and limit the effectiveness of implemented initiatives. Combining a clear national strategy with appropriate financing models is not only desirable, but essential to address the current and future challenges facing Chile's higher education system.

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FUNDING AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Nondegree Education in Europe: Opportunities for Lifelong Learning

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European higher education institutions and policy makers have granted increasing attention to the importance of shorter, nondegree education provision, as avenues to offer upskilling and reskilling to learners and workers, but also as a contribution of higher education to lifelong learning in society more generally. A recent study from the European University Association provides an overview of the extent to which such shorter learning provision is present in the European Higher Education Area. This paper also points to challenges identified by higher education institutions themselves and ways forward, in a context where processes and regulations are geared by default toward degree education, but where complementarity between longer and shorter education provision might become key to the future of learning in higher education.

IN the past years, European higher education institutions (HEIs) and policy makers have granted increasing attention to the rise in importance of shorter, nondegree education provision. Whereas, historically, the Bologna Process has focused on the reform of degree structures, installing the now familiar bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees as the standard structure in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), more and more policy conversations and statements now evolve around the possibilities offered by shorter learning opportunities, such as microcredentials and opportunities to "upskill" and "reskill" learners and workers. The 2020 Rome Communiqué of the Bologna Process mentions such opportunities as a way "to enable learners to develop or update their cultural, professional and transversal skills and competences at various stages in their lives," and the 2024 Tirana Communiqué proposes that microcredentials should be further addressed in the recognition of prior learning and in the revision of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) Users' Guide.

In the same time period, communications and narratives of the European Commission, notably in the European Skills Agenda and the 2022 European Strategy for Universities, have confirmed the policy focus on short learning provision from the European Union's side. The higher education sector is not identified as the sole provider for such learning opportunities. On the contrary, this general trend profiles other education and training sectors (such as vocational education or other tertiary education sectors) or employers and companies providing professional workplace learning as major stakeholders in upskilling and reskilling. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that many universities in Europe have a history of providing continuing education to graduates, as well as a commitment to an inclusion and widening access agenda, thus concretely contributing to lifelong learning. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences on the higher education sector worldwide have prompted a reflection on the importance of making learning more flexible at many European universities – with "flexibility" meaning not only more adaptable or individualized learning modalities as could be the case in any study program, including in degree education, but also in the form of nondegree credits.

The Current State

What is the current situation at European HEIs? The 2024 *Trends* report of the European University Association (EUA) shows that 71 percent of institutions currently offer nondegree programs or courses in the form of learning certificates, badges or microcredentials. Another 21 percent of HEIs are planning to do so. Moreover, half of European institutions predict an increase of students in their nondegree programs in the upcoming five years, with another 25 percent predicting stable numbers, often following an increase in the past five years. This shows how aware and active HEIs are, both in better addressing demands from prospective learners and policy makers, and in playing a renewed or increased role in society as key players in lifelong learning.

However, the situation varies across countries. *Trends 2024* shows that nondegree education is widespread, for instance, at HEIs surveyed in Belgium, Bulgaria, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland. However, that is much less the case in Germany and Slovenia, where only about 40% of institutions offer it. This diversity may depend on how active other education and training providers are in the country, but it might also relate to how easy it is to organize and recognize such offer. The 2024 *Bologna Process Implementation Report*, based on data provided by national

authorities and published by the Eurydice office of the European Union, notes that only a few higher education systems in the EHEA have taken steps to ensure transparency, cross-country readability and portability of microcredentials already offered by HEIs. A closer look at the legal frameworks in place also suggests that the concept is not understood in the same way across all countries. Only 10 systems currently include microcredentials in their national qualifications framework. According to *Trends 2024* data, 63 percent of institutions in the EHEA find legal and regulatory obstacles at national level challenging for organizing and offering shorter, nondegree education.

Challenges

European HEIs surveyed in the report identified further challenges that confirm the importance (and lack) of adequate regulatory and funding frameworks for recognizing and organizing nondegree education. At the top of the list, 71 percent of institutions noted the difficulty in identifying the demand for such programs or courses. About two-thirds of institutions also reported issues related to recognition and to finding an adequate funding or business model (including issues related to fees) – a trend confirmed globally in the 2023 report *International trends of lifelong learning in higher education* issued by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Awarding credit upon completion, quality assurance, and the format and design of such courses are other challenges reported by HEIs. Last but not least, it is interesting to note that, while most institutions in the EHEA count on increased student numbers for this type of education, 56 percent of them struggle to define the status that they should grant to these students (and 23 percent of HEIs have no information on the number of nondegree learners at their institution). As summarized in another 2024 EUA report, institutions try to "accommodate demands within existing resources and organizational and regulatory frameworks, which may be unfit," and in the absence of confirmed and commonly agreed European, national and institution-level approaches for issues that should typically be solved collectively (such as recognition and the awarding of credits).

Looking Forward

What steps should HEIs take in order to look forward and match their ambitions in proposing nondegree education to a growing number of learners? While, for now at least, institutions tend to confirm that degree education will remain the by-default reference for higher education, current developments might not rule out the possibility of shorter units of learning either becoming sufficient by themselves to fill the learners' and professions' needs, recognized as a qualification (which is already the case in some places), and/or stackable up to a degree. However, currently, the challenges identified by HEIs themselves mostly show frustration over existing frameworks and processes that make degree education difficult to change and adapt at a rapid pace. As *Trends 2024* put it, nondegree education might be widespread in the EHEA, but it remains patchy and dependent on local and regional contexts and needs. HEIs should carefully examine, for themselves and throughout the institution, the value and vision that they would prioritize when offering nondegree education, as well as what kind of complementarity with degree education should be reached. Together with policy makers and students, they should also consider how an education offer consisting of both degree and nondegree provision can provide more flexible learning journeys, which would benefit a wide range of learners and an increasingly diverse student body. For what is actually at stake is there: universities can offer education in multiple ways, ranging from degree study programs to continuing professional development for graduates to part-time provision for adult learners to nondegree credits. But their role in lifelong learning is part of what would define their role in providing what society needs: shaping future graduates that can fully play their role, as citizens and as professionals in tomorrow's world.

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REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Decolonial Shift or Coloniality? Regional Cooperation in East and Southeast Asia

You Zhang

Calls to decolonize global higher education are growing. In East and Southeast Asia, increasing regional cooperation reflects a decolonial shift, challenging Western dominance in global higher education. However, regional cooperation is often regarded as secondary to partnerships with Western institutions, raising concerns that actors in the region may inadvertently perpetuate Western hegemony in global higher education.

Discussions on the persistent Western dominance in global higher education have been increasing. Western dominance is often linked to coloniality—a concept referring to the legitimization of Western ways of being and knowing through enduring colonial structures that transcend historical periods and persist into the present. Coloniality marginalizes non-Western traditions, leading to epistemic injustices and loss of cultural and epistemic diversity. In global higher education, coloniality is manifested in the dominance of English in research publications. In East and Southeast Asia, coloniality also manifests in the internationalization of curricula, which often means importing Western standards and norms into local curricula. Research suggests that the increasing regional cooperation among universities in East and Southeast Asia offers a unique opportunity to decolonize global higher education. This collaboration recognizes and challenges Western dominance, emphasizes the value of Asian knowledge systems, and thus offers an opportunity to enhance epistemic diversity in the global knowledge system. However, discussions on regional cooperation remain entangled in enduring coloniality, as the perception that Western partners are superior to regional ones persists, and universities tend to believe that collaboration with Western universities is equal to global engagement.

Regional Cooperation in East and Southeast Asia as a Decolonial Shift

Regional cooperation as a decolonial shift is manifested in Asia becoming a popular region for academic cooperation, challenging the long-standing preference to collaborate with Western institutions. For example, in Japan, while the United States and Europe remain popular destinations for outbound student mobility, a significant number of Japanese students now want to go to Asia because Asia is seen as dynamic. More explicitly, the manifestation of the decolonial shift lies in why regional cooperation is important for universities in East and Southeast Asia. Research suggests that regional cooperation is partly driven by the recognition that cultural and epistemic diversity in the region contributes to student learning. In China, university leaders are concerned about the majority of students preferring to study in Western countries, which may lead to students' narrow understanding of the world. In response, some universities in China encourage students to study in Asia and to appreciate the cultural diversity in the region, sometimes through providing scholarships as incentives. This represents a decolonial shift where learning in and about Asia is increasingly considered valuable, giving legitimacy to the value of non-Western cultures and knowledge.

In the same vein, research suggests that there is a growing recognition among universities in East and Southeast Asia that epistemic traditions from Asia can contribute to epistemic diversity in the Western-centric global knowledge system. For example, Japanese universities have long been integrating traditional Japanese knowledge with Western knowledge, which is valuable to the global knowledge system. Furthermore, there is a recognition that the expertise and knowledge gained from regional partners can be more applicable to universities' local contexts compared to that learned from Western universities.

In essence, regional cooperation in East and Southeast Asia represents a decolonial shift by recognizing Asia as a dynamic region for academic collaboration and valuing its cultural and epistemic diversity. This growing recognition and appreciation of Asia's contributions to the global knowledge systems challenges Western dominance in global higher education.

Entrenched Coloniality in Global Higher Education

Yet, research suggests that there is still a perception that regional cooperation is secondary to Western partners. For example, in Vietnam, some university leaders see regional cooperation as an easier and more accessible approach to internationalization, but they aim to establish a global presence by collaborating with

universities in countries like Italy or Sweden. Interestingly, African and Latin American universities are not mentioned when discussing these global ambitions. There is a similar tendency among universities in Thailand to prioritize collaboration with Western universities, despite the fact that regional universities, such as those in Indonesia or Malaysia, possess the expertise from which they seek to learn.

Furthermore, there is a perception that Asia is one entity, suggesting that a lack of diversity in the region makes it less inspiring compared to collaborating with universities outside of Asia, which brings more diversity and can possibly inspire solutions to Asia's challenges. The preference for collaborating with Western institutions, rather than universities within their own region, in Africa, or in Latin America, suggests that Western dominance is deeply entrenched in global higher education and is unfortunately further reinforced by actors in non-Western countries themselves.

Research indicates that even in Japan, a country that is traditionally seen as part of the Global North, some universities aim to be more recognizable to universities in the West through being part of *regional* alliances. While collaborating with Western universities would be valuable and is not inherently problematic, the need for *recognition by* Western universities implies a power imbalance that places Western countries at the center.

Furthermore, historical imperialism and contemporary power dynamics within the East and Southeast Asia region might risk creating new forms of coloniality. For example, research suggests that Japanese university leaders recognize Japan's historical involvement in war and colonization within the region, emphasizing the consequent responsibility of Japanese universities to contribute to a prosperous future for Southeast Asia. Japanese university leaders position regional collaboration with Southeast Asian universities as a critical mechanism to address historical legacies. Another example is Chinese universities' engagement in capacity-building initiatives aimed at enhancing education systems in Southeast Asian countries. Chinese or Japanese universities imply their leading role in their relationships with universities in Southeast Asia, reflecting the two countries' dominant position in the region. While these initiatives are well-intended, the intraregional power relations, if overlooked, might risk creating new forms of coloniality, where Chinese or Japanese knowledge traditions might assert dominance and legitimacy within the region, marginalizing other significant local knowledge traditions.

The Way Forward

In summary, research suggests that there is a growing recognition of Western dominance in global higher education and intentional efforts to highlight the cultural and epistemic diversity of East and Southeast Asia, as well as the regions' contributions to the global knowledge system. These represent the hope to decolonize global higher education; that is, they represent the hope to cultivate the recognition and legitimation of diverse ways of being and ways of knowing. Yet, there seem to be enduring hurdles to decolonizing global higher education, particularly due to entrenched coloniality. Furthermore, intraregional power relations within East and Southeast Asia may give rise to new forms of coloniality if they are not critically examined and addressed.

As such, there is an urgent need to actively decolonize practices in higher education and beyond. While it is crucial for actors in Western countries to advocate for and participate in decolonization efforts, it is equally vital for those in non-Western countries to embrace and affirm the intrinsic value of different knowledge systems, including their own, and their equal contributions to global higher education. This requires acknowledging that non-Western traditions are often marginalized or deemed illegitimate—not due to any lack of inherent value, but as a consequence of historical colonialism and ongoing coloniality. Thus, it is important for all involved in global higher education to reflect on the underlying assumptions of our work, particularly addressing the presence of coloniality. Concretely, it is important to build both regional and global partnerships on the principles of equality, reciprocity, and respect for diverse ways of being and knowing.

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REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

India: Politics and Threats to Academic Freedom

Philip G. Altbach and Eldho Mathews

Higher education in India has always been influenced by politics, but the current Bharatiya Janata Party government has greatly increased politicization. Political interference in the hiring of vice-chancellors and professors, restrictions on academic freedom, and other problems have become commonplace. This interference threatens a free and open intellectual environment, as seen in recent censorship cases and punitive actions against faculty and students in many institutions.

In June 2024, shortly after securing his third term as prime minister, Narendra Modi inaugurated the new campus of Nalanda University in Bihar in the eastern part of India. During the function, Modi underscored the importance of creating and maintaining an academic environment where knowledge can be freely pursued by stating that "Nalanda is the proclamation of the truth that knowledge cannot be destroyed even though books would burn in a fire." However, the post-2010 evolution of Nalanda University, an East Asian joint effort, contradicts this statement as it reflects the challenges of maintaining academic independence, as well as the complex relationship between universities and political forces in India.

Indian higher education has always been political. In the years following independence, politicians (and others) started colleges and universities to advance their careers and build support. In recent decades, there has been a resurgence of politicians founding large-scale private educational enterprises, encompassing schools, colleges, and universities. Because higher education is such an important lever for social advancement and economic success, it is always of great interest to society.

Numerous instances can be found where state and central government authorities strategically placed new postsecondary institutions in politically advantageous locations. Many of them were established to cater to the demands of the electorate based on various sociocultural factors as well. The naming and renaming of universities is often influenced by politics and regional identities. For example, Pune University was renamed Savitribai Phule Pune University to recognize the contributions of the social reformer Savitribai Phule. The University of Bombay became the University of Mumbai to reflect the city's name change from Bombay to Mumbai. There have also been demands to establish central universities named after spiritual leaders Guru Gobind Singh in Bihar and Sree Narayana Guru in Kerala.

Academic appointments or promotions were sometimes made for reasons other than the quality of the professor, vice-chancellor, or principal, but rather based on personal or political factors. The norms of academic freedom were not always firmly followed, especially in many undergraduate colleges, and teachers were careful in what they taught or wrote.

Yet, overall, Indian higher education, particularly the universities, adhered to international norms of academic freedom. Generally, professors were free to teach without fear of being disciplined or fired for their views. They were able to do research and to publish their work freely, and to speak and write in public forums and the media. The universities, often mired in bureaucracy, occasionally faced allegations of political interference in the recruitment of faculty members. However, they enjoyed relative autonomy when it came to the promotion of existing faculty.

Fundamental Political Change

It is fair to say that Indian higher education has become fundamentally politicized in the Modi era. This is a grave danger to academic institutions, the academic profession, and intellectual life on the whole. These trends can, of course, be seen as part of the "illiberal" trends in society generally—and of course India is not alone in these developments. At some point the rest of the world, including India's potential academic partners, will notice this deterioration in academe, and it may affect their decisions at a time when India seeks to join the top levels of global higher education.

There is no doubt that the political elites responsible for this politicization are well aware of the importance of higher education in Indian intellectual life; silencing and intimidating critical voices is a hallmark of "illiberal" societies everywhere.

Examples of Change

Not long ago, Congress Party leader Rahul Gandhi made some comments about politically appointed vice-chancellors and received much criticism. But the fact is that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) authorities throughout the country have been replacing university vice-chancellors with politically pliable appointees, many of whom have little higher education experience. These appointees have been reshaping the universities with politically

allied faculty and through other changes. This is the first time in India's postindependence history that such direct interference in academe has become common. It is so egregious that the non-BJP governments in the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Punjab are trying to remove the centrally appointed state governors as the largely honorific chancellors of the state universities, which gives them power to control the vice-chancellor appointment process.

Academic freedom is also under attack. Perhaps the most sinister aspect is that self-censorship has become common, especially in the social sciences and humanities. Even senior academics are afraid to publish work that they think might create problems for them from state authorities or pro-BJP media. There have been several widely reported cases where well-known professors have published controversial material and their universities have not protected them. It was reported that in his resignation letter to Ashoka University in 2021, prominent political scientist Pratap Bhanu Mehta wrote that his public writing in support of constitutional values of freedom and equal respect for all citizens was perceived as carrying risks for the university.

Even respected journals known for their independence have become off-limits. The fact that these pressures are being felt even at the top of India's academic system says a lot about the situation throughout Indian higher education. Professor Sameena Dalwai, a faculty member at the O.P. Jindal Global University, recently encountered an online smear campaign orchestrated by right-wing groups alongside the lodging of a police complaint against her. Other incidents, such as the suspension of Professor K.S. James from his role as director of the International Institute for Population Sciences in Mumbai, and the deportation of the United Kingdom–based anthropologist Filippo Osella from Thiruvananthapuram Airport in Kerala, also paint a grim picture.

Even students have become embroiled in campus politicization. Recently, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences suspended a PhD student over alleged "antinational activities." The Progressive Students Forum, however, formerly led by the student, claimed that his suspension was due to participating in a protest march against the central government's "antistudent policies." Of course, traditional campus politics continue, although rightist student organizations such as the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad are more active than in the past, even at traditionally leftist universities such as Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. But what is new is that students are reporting their professors to campus administrators if they disagree with the content of their classes. This sometimes leads to faculty members being disciplined.

Implications

These trends are extraordinarily dangerous for Indian higher education and civic life generally. An independent and free academic sector is important for any society. The academic profession must be free to engage in unfettered research, and have the ability to publish and to speak out in areas of their academic expertise. This is as true for the "soft sciences" as it is for STEM fields. This may be especially the case in India, where many top intellectuals and analysts are in the universities. Further, as India seeks to build world-class universities and to engage with the best universities worldwide, academic freedom and autonomy are necessary prerequisites.

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