

Global Germany in Transnational Dialogues

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Global Germany in Transnational Dialogues presents original research work from contributors in a cutting-edge collection of case and monograph studies in humanities, business, economics, law, education, cultural studies and science. It offers concise yet in-depth overviews of contemporary ties between Germany and nations in flux, such as Afghanistan, Korea, and Israel, as well as societies with long-standing ties to the Federal Republic. It serves as an arena for both scholars and practitioners to apply comparative and interconnected research outcomes connected to topics such as educational policies, Muslimness, refugee integration, nation branding and digital societies to other transnational contexts. This series is an interdisciplinary project to offer a fresh look at Germany's relations to other countries in the 21st century. The bilateral concept is anchored in a renewed interest in Germany's innovative stance on identity politics, fiscal policies, civil law and national cultures. The series caters to a renewed interest in transnational studies and the actors working across the boundaries of nation states.

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Editors

Transnational German Education and Comparative Education Systems

Research and Practice

 Springer

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Foreword

The German higher education system has a remarkably rich history. The first research university was established in Berlin in 1810 by Wilhelm von Humboldt. From an international comparative perspective, the idea of the Berlin University, that means a university where research and teaching took place under one roof and were embodied in one role, namely that of the professor, was historically new. Therefore, the German system had a strong impact on very different national systems worldwide—from Scandinavia to American research universities and Japan. After the early twentieth century, however, the system began to lose its appeal and, at the end of the twentieth century, the German system appeared outdated in international higher education policy. Since the 2000s, one can observe an increasing international interest in higher education in Germany owing to a variety of reasons. (For an extensive overview of the main characteristics of the German system, see Hüther and Krücken 2018). The priority on internationalisation across all levels of the system, the Excellence Initiative in research and the absence of tuition fees, despite the rapid rise in the student population and “*Duales Studium*” programs that integrate higher education and vocational education, have made the German higher education system relevant and fascinating again. Furthermore, with academic freedom currently under siege in even the most unexpected countries, German academia may well consider itself lucky that the principle of academic freedom is enshrined in the National Constitution and, if necessary, defended by the Institutional Court.

Despite these attributes, as compared to other countries and their higher education institutions, Germany began to engage rather late in transnational education. *Transnational German Education and Comparative Education Systems: Research and Practice*, edited by Benjamin Nickl, Deane Blackler and Stefan Popenici, gives an intriguing overview of this ever-important field in higher education. In three parts, its history and structural features are discussed and practical examples given. In addition, comparisons with other education systems play an important role, but also more recent topics like postcolonial discourses and their impact on the curriculum of German language and studies programs are included. The reader gets fascinating insights into a vibrant and highly diverse field where different layers and facets of a highly complex issue are brought to the fore and discussed critically.

This wonderful and diverse collection of contributions made me reflect on the wider implications of transnational education. Surely, there is a strong instrumental component, for example regarding transnational mobility and skill formation. The German system, with its different layers of higher education institutions and its historically strong linkages to the labour market, especially in technical disciplines, is an interesting case, as well as some of the examples from other countries, for example China; however, and though it is hard to measure, I am convinced that the importance of higher education institutions for an increasingly globalised world does not stop here. As offered by cosmopolitan and discursive institutions, higher education is of pivotal importance for social integration and for provision of appropriate ways of dealing with diverging opinions and perspectives in a world where parochialism and dogmatism seem to prevail. Philosopher and political theorist Jon Elster (1983), for instance, makes use of the concept of “the essential by-product”, which means that a goal that can only be achieved indirectly by aiming at some other, typically more tangible, objective. Following this line of thought, the by-product of teaching, learning and research should never be underestimated also in our case, as educators.

Beyond that, transnational education can be, in the words of philosopher Laurie A. Paul (2014), a truly transformative experience. For her, making decisions can lead to transformative experiences when they are based on decisions we make that shape our future selves in an irreversible way and transform the persons that we were. We can hardly imagine the impact of such decisions on the way we see the world, as our worldviews are profoundly altered by them. Transformative experiences are unsettling and, at times, painful. Transnational education can be such an experience, as it interrogates hitherto unquestioned assumptions that, in everyday life, are taken for granted. According to my personal experience, such processes can be unsettling and, indeed at times, painful. On very different levels, individual, organisational and systemic, one is confronted with some kind of otherness that challenges dominant identity constructs.

On the one hand, German students, universities and the entire system of education, for example, can be confronted with open and mostly hidden colonial legacies that extend into the present, questioning naïve ideas of progress and doing good in the world. To quote the title of a highly influential paper from post-colonialist feminist Chandra Mohanty (1986), much of our understanding and representation of “the world” is “Under Western Eyes”, and we can hardly deny the explicit and implicit assumptions and constructions of otherness in transnational education. On the other hand, partners in transnational education might be confronted with a broad understanding of academic freedom, which not only includes a clear division of academic and religious affairs, and liberty of thought and expression, but also the refusal of given and clear-cut gender roles and sexual identities, as well as the protection of minorities as core ideas in academic life. Such ideas might conflict with the basic cultural ideas of other national systems and the organisations and individuals therein. One should expect neither diffusion nor fusion, not even approximation, but rather misunderstandings, incomprehension and conflict. Higher education is a cosmopolitan and discursive field. As such, it is

prone to shape transformational experiences in a globalised world. We should be grateful for this book by Benjamin Nickl, Deane Blackler and Stefan Popenici and its contributors for addressing such a timely and relevant issue.

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Editors' Notes

Reflecting on the Challenges and Opportunities for Comparative Education Studies

Or Why We are Arguing Against Limiting Silo-Studies

A Circumspect Viewpoint is Crucial

Most publications in Comparative Education focus on either microscopic issues of education or they take a decidedly sweeping view of macro-units of education. Some approaches dwell on the local and the miniscule detail of social contexts, while others include only political and economic views on education and education systems which are international or supranational. The range of research narratives is equally broad and has become, and is still becoming, more polarised with Comparative Education courses at universities taught along lines of self-interested bifurcation: one quarter of education studies and its literature looks to individuals, groups and communities, while most others gravitate towards the education system of regions, areas and countries, or the overall system of education. Inasmuch as case studies are present, they are typically used to incorporate voluminous bodies of data and descriptors of markers denoting educational success or failure.

Yet, we find ourselves in an age of transnational connectivity. There is a growing competition in education as both an export and an import industry in most countries of the world. Actors and agencies involved with education domestically and outside their host country are going about their business in ways comparable to multinational industry giants. Actions in educational policy are multi-layered and must serve a host of interests. Thinking about education has become vertical and omnidirectional, influenced by politicians, social forces, economic decisions and cultural changes, though perhaps no other influence reverberates as much through every single level of education, and globally intertwined education systems, than

that of neoliberalism. What, then, happens to education and education systems if their underlying principles are transformed through privatisation, supranational agents of educational governance and a hitherto unforeseen level of decentralisation in the global education circuit?

These questions are rarely commented on in studies of Comparative Education as one side considers its micro-unit approach far richer and more productive than the other side's macro-unit perspective and vice versa. The large and the granular perspectives, just like the national and the transnational dimensions laid out in this book, however, are vital factors in the configuration that is the global education complex in the twenty-first century. There is a complacent duality in the common approaches to Comparative Education studies, which has created the impression that one can discuss and analyse decades of changes and interrelated developments in education settings from only one viewpoint. In so many important respects, and with a specific look towards Germany and *Transnational German Education*, we are certain that this model of Comparative Education is outdated.

Questioning the Market Model

Working on a volume on German transnational education opened the opportunity for us to invite contributions from junior and senior scholars, education experts, teachers, education practitioners and government officials. Some wrote about how they challenge the dull and dangerous consensus on market-based higher education and its ideological approach that is withering the intellectual function of the university. The managerial, efficiency-obsessed narrative of neoliberalism, which has colonised higher education across the world for the last several decades, is placing transnational cooperation and dialogue within a narrow transactional logic of profit and market arrangements. In effect, the ideological framework at the heart of most higher education systems is taking democratisation and multi-voiced dissent as a threat to the proper functioning of the education industry market. Alternative thinking is presented as a threat against all, not against a particular perspective or ideological fundamentalism. Genuine critiques and alternative solutions are presented or approached as an attack against prosperity, progress and institutional development. This is, in fact, just a natural point of convergence for all totalitarian narratives. Soviet intellectuals discovered very soon that any inconvenient idea was not taken as an attack on leaders (or managers), but as an effort to undermine the common good, the social order, prosperity and success. Such an approach had to be ignored (for a while), publicly ridiculed and ultimately sanctioned. The irrationality of the free and unregulated market model overruns education, health, access to clear air and water and even some of the most personal spaces such as individual privacy, emotions and personal agency. The rule is that, if any space is opened to markets and profit, all other rules or considerations are trumped by a mythology that ignores, with remarkable obstinacy, any evidence that can suggest an alternative approach. Commercialisation has been leading to a long list of serious dysfunctions as a principle governing higher education. It has created a new context for higher

education, with positive changes, such as the expansion of access and research, as well as negatives ones such as the withering of intellectual discourse and the marketisation of thinking.

Taking into Account the Global Political Climate

We are at a point where the increase in isolationism, border separations and the compulsion to build disunion walls—metaphoric or concrete—is all requiring a new, insightful and far-reaching effort to defend civilisation. Transnational education can be a tool to actually create new colonising narratives or an efficient way to deal with risks presented by mindless agreement on various marketing and political sloganeering, neoliberal and free-market fundamentalisms and intolerant discourse. Higher learning is now facing challenges ranging from the fascist nature of what the mass media are superficially labelling “populism” or an “anti-establishment” wave, the “supremacist”, nationalist and fascist backslide, to the set of tech-solutions that are subtly promoting the pseudo-science of eugenics or the aggressive anti-intellectual tendencies of various extremist movements. These are all shaping a treacherous future and require an answer; however, academia mostly ignored as marginal the risk represented by new vast manipulations, misinformation, post-truth narratives and—most of all—totalitarian approaches. One possible explanation can be that higher education itself adopted a culture shaped by an intolerant ideology, focused on “efficiencies” and profit. Nevertheless, it becomes clear now that academics have to restructure and reaffirm the culture of genuine and courageous inquiry, intellectual dissent and originality, thereby countering simplistic solutions and magical thinking.

A Critical Transnational Focus

In this context, a volume analysing transnational education is a refreshing opportunity to reflect on the fact that internationalisation and transnational cooperation were key principles in the establishment of the very first modern universities, since the University of Bologna was set up in the eleventh century. Since then, knowledge has been considered free and universal by universities, shared and explored for the benefit of human civilisation. We can restructure our perspective considering that, around the fifteenth century, Erasmus of Rotterdam was studying in France, England, Belgium and Italy—a transnational scholar. His name still inspires, in the twenty-first century, the EU program for education, training, youth and sport, the most developed program of student exchanges in the world. This sense of normality, even making the simple effort of thinking about cross-border higher education beyond the narrow understanding represented by commercial interests, is vital to rebuild the ethos of academia and the strength required to answer its challenges. A new survey of transnational issues, including topics such as education beyond national boundaries, the aim to decolonise discourse, building cross-border institutional cooperation, exploring language and transnational contexts or multicultural and cross-cultural competencies in teaching and learning in higher education, offers a different starting point for the necessary change.

This volume is not the solution to any of the challenges already presented, and it never aimed to be a solution. It is a collection of studies on what should be relevant for us to think about when academia pieces together the complex puzzle required for a sustainable and less worrying future for education.

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Introduction

Transnational German Education Editors in Conversation with Prof. Xiaohu Feng, University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, PR China, President of Beijing Humboldt Forum

TGE EDITORS: *What did initially attract you to German Studies?*

PROFESSOR FENG: Well, I must say, in the beginning, it was based on very practical considerations. I did the national college entrance examination, the so-called Gao Kao, in 1978. At that time, there were not many subjects that could be chosen at the universities. I asked my father for advice. He said that a foreign language like German could be a good choice for my future, because compared with English, German was still a less commonly used language, which means I could be very competitive in the job market after college study; furthermore, the country has also a very positive image in China. So I followed his advice.

After graduating from college, I did get a decent job as translator for the government. But the more skilled I was in the language, the more I wanted to learn about the country and its culture. So I went back to college at 25 to take a post-graduate class at Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU). Between 1990 and 1992, I received a DAAD-scholarship as visiting scholar to the Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz. After 12 years studying its language, it was my first time seeing the country with my own eyes. In 1995, I became a doctoral candidate at BFSU in German linguistics and received my doctorate in 1999. In 2003, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

provided me with a fellowship for postdoctoral research, which allowed me to undertake a project about cognitive metaphors at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in Germany.

Let's say I did not fall in love with German Studies at first sight, but I have recognised its beauty during the study. And of course, the financial support from German foundations have enhanced my love of it.

TGE EDITORS: *How does your background in German Studies relate to your current position at UIBE in Beijing?*

PROFESSOR FENG: I have been teaching German language at UIBE since 1989. In 2013, I initiated and organised the Beijing Humboldt Forum (BHF) at UIBE, which is nowadays annually supported by the AvH-Foundation and UIBE. More than 5000 guests not only from Germany but also from the whole world have taken part in the BHF. Besides that, I am Director of the Sino-German-Center for Economics and Culture and Acting Director of the Austria Center for Culture.

TGE EDITORS: *What role does German higher education play in China in 2019?*

PROFESSOR FENG: It is a very good question. I think because of the stereotyping of Prussians, German higher education speaks for a system with virtues like efficiency and discipline in China. On the other hand, although the Chinese students, like other international students in Germany, are more likely to choose a university over a university of applied sciences, the latter, the so-called Fachhochschule (FH), has always been seen as a role model for the vocational education in China because of its dual system; however, there are two different types in the dual system: so-called "Duale Ausbildung" and "Duales Studium".

Actually, the "Duale Ausbildung" is the traditional vocational education in China, which mainly focuses on the praxis and technical skills; "Duales Studium" is, however, a modern education form which brings the academic theory-learning and praxis together, which means besides the practical experience, the students could also receive an academic degree that is acknowledged by most of the countries in the world.

TGE EDITORS:

Please present to us the history and impact of The Beijing Humboldt Forum from the perspective of a local Chinese scholar involved with German Studies. What do you find is the Forum's main purpose?

PROFESSOR FENG:

The first Beijing-Humboldt-Forum (BHF) in 2013 was held as a side event of the EU-China Summit co-chaired by Premier Li Keqiang of the State Council and President José Manuel Barroso of the European Commission. As an international conference, BHF has been successfully held six times and takes place regularly every year on the third weekend of September at UIBE.

Focusing on “Green Economy” and “Cultural Heritage”, Beijing Humboldt Forum pays close attention to social hot topics such as “Urbanisation”, “Sinology”, and “Sustainable Utilisation of Raw Materials”, “Area Studies”, “Green Building”, “Industry 4.0”, “AI and Linguistic Research”, and so on.

Besides the conference reports, Beijing Humboldt Forum cooperates with domestic and international high-end scientific research institutions and organizes different sessions every year. Each year, BHF invites a number of representatives from different universities and research institutes, as well as domestic and international business leaders together, to join the sessions to review and analyse the key points and hot issues, which provides all the members with an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspective during the discussions.

Beijing Humboldt Forum, as a standing conference of UIBE, also offers an academic platform for all the young students, including the students from UIBE, to learn, communicate and expand the international horizon. Many students of UIBE have successfully set up ties through the active participation of academic reports on BHF with academic institutes in Germany and then gone abroad for further study. Seven of them have gained scholarships from the China Scholarship Council (CSC) and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Germany.

TGE EDITORS: *What do you think the Forum will look like in 10 years from now?*

PROFESSOR FENG: Well, I always preach that the BHF will be another Davos, but not only focusing on economy, but also on culture. Meanwhile, the BHF will always have a close cooperation with the universities, because one of the main purposes that will be never changed is giving our young students an international platform to present themselves as well as to have the chance to view the world from an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspective.

TGE EDITORS: *You are collaborating closely with German higher education institutions like the DAAD. What do these collaborations look like and how have they changed over time?*

PROFESSOR FENG: At the beginning, my collaborations with German higher education institutions like the DAAD, AvH or other institutions were more from the individual aspect, like scholarships or invitations for short-term visiting. I sincerely appreciate the help I received from German institutions and devote myself to repaying it.

Nowadays, I am glad that our collaboration is not only on the individual level, but extended to an institutional level. The Beijing Humboldt Forum mentioned before is, for example, the result of our international cooperation with different German institutions.

TGE EDITORS: *You are part of UIBE's Foreign Studies faculty and UIBE offers a German Studies program. Can you describe the structure of the program?*

PROFESSOR FENG: Of course. The German Studies program that UIBE offers consists of a four-year bachelor degree program and two-year Masters degree program. In the bachelor program, the students will learn not only rules of German grammar but also the culture. Furthermore, as a University focusing on Business and Economics, we also provide courses for Business Management and Economics in German and encourage the students to take part in courses given by other Faculty like Principles of Management, Financial Accounting, Corporate Finance, Applied Statistics, Probability and Statistics, Principles of Marketing, Business English and so on. In the Masters program, there are four subject areas that could be chosen: German literature, German linguistics, German law, and German economics.

The highlight of the German Studies program is our Business Management (Betriebswirtschaftslehre) 4+2 class, which is jointly organized by the Foreign Studies faculty and three related German universities (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen and Universität Potsdam). After graduating from UIBE with a bachelor degree, students who meet the requirements of German universities have the opportunity to choose the Master of Business Management (BWL) program in one of the three related German universities.

TGE EDITORS:

What careers do students in this program pursue?

PROFESSOR FENG:

It depends. Out of their skilled German language and academic training about international business economics, a lot of our students make a career in international companies like BMW or VW. There are also quite a lot of students who work in education institutions like DAAD or Neworiental, a famous language training company and have done a really good job in making contributions to the international cultural exchange. Except for applying for a job, a proportion of our alumni devote themselves to academic research in the areas of economics or German studies, and apply for Ph.D. programs abroad. I am proud of all of them.

TGE EDITORS:

What do you think motivates Chinese undergraduate and Chinese graduate students to study in Germany?

PROFESSOR FENG:

First of all, I have mentioned, the German higher education has a very good reputation in China. Furthermore, comparing with England or USA, where the tuition fees for college are so high that lots of parents have to give up the idea of sending their children abroad, most German universities offer free higher education to domestic and international students alike, which makes Germany become a very popular study destination standing alongside the US, the UK, Canada and Australia for Chinese students.

According to Statista 2019, China is the largest source of international students at German universities and the proportion of Chinese students amounts to 10% of the total population of international students in Germany. In the Winter Semester of 2017/2018, there were nearly 40,000 Chinese students enrolled in German higher education institutions.

Moreover, Germany is one of the most advanced countries in Europe, which means the students with experience studying in Germany could have a good chance of a career in Germany; on the other hand, they would also be competitive in the domestic job market. Of course, there are also some private motives which make Chinese students want to study in Germany. For example, the love of football or German cars.

TGE EDITORS: *And why do you believe German students come to China for exchange programs?*

PROFESSOR FENG: China is a vibrant country and one of the world's oldest civilizations. Taking part in exchange programs in China, German students will have the chance to explore life in the fast-paced commercial hubs of China with an intriguing history, like Beijing, Shanghai or Chengdu. It is also a good opportunity for them to get an overview of Chinese language and culture as well as an understanding of China's place in the modern world. In recent years, more and more international students come to China for study or exchange. Almost 20 percent students at UIBE are international students from all over the world.

TGE EDITORS: *Do you think transnational joint university collaborations are the future for the Chinese-German higher education sector?*

PROFESSOR FENG: Yes, of course. Transnational joint university collaborations are truly mainstream now for the Chinese-German higher education sector. In 2015, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBWF) released a "China Strategy 2015–2020", which strongly supports the collaboration between Chinese and German universities from the political aspect.

TGE EDITORS: *What do you think is the main attraction for China to collaborate with German higher education institutions?*

PROFESSOR FENG: In my opinion, the main attraction for China to collaborate with German higher education institutions is that the students who are interested in the country, the people, the culture, the most developed technics and the language, for instance, could have the chance to study abroad at partner universities as well as to join courses in China, which are offered by experts from partner higher education institutions in Germany.

TGE EDITORS: *What can each country learn from the other?*

PROFESSOR FENG: Well, in this world of globalisation, I think lots of stereotypes are changing. So it is hard to say “one country” learns from “the other”. But I think the elementary education in China has a lot of advantages that could be introduced to Germany. You can criticize the Chinese elementary education system all you want, but the fact is that the students with this elementary education background are always the top performers in international competitions. As far as I know, many British Schools have already adopted Chinese Maths Textbooks to improve the Maths skills of their children. On the other hand, the German higher education system has a very long tradition and a global reputation for doctoral research and vocational education, which China is learning from.

TGE EDITORS: *Which of Germany’s university and higher education structures has China taken on board and why?*

PROFESSOR FENG: The “Lehrstuhl”-structure, in English: a senior professor is a “chair”, which means such a professor is not only a teacher of one subject, but is responsible for one whole research area or direction at the university. Such a professor can lead a team which consists of students and junior teachers interested in this area, and could lead them directly to pursue research projects. In my opinion, it is a win-win-win model for the professors, students and universities.

TGE EDITORS: *What do you think are common misunderstandings about Chinese education systems from a German perspective?*

PROFESSOR FENG: Well, I think it may be the criticism that the Chinese education system is just an “exam-machine” without encouraging the innovative characters of our children. Actually, our children today have so many possibilities to learn things that they really like - the things that I could not imagine in my childhood, like building model airplanes or cars, learning how to paint in oils, how to play the piano, and so on. But, of course, if you really want to achieve something, you need to work hard. No pain, no gain—it works for the whole world.

TGE EDITORS:

What does the future hold for German higher education in China? And Chinese higher education in Germany? Are there any trends?

PROFESSOR FENG:

German higher education could extend the partnerships in China and build up more cooperation with the universities in the so-called “second-class” cities. Not only the metropolitan ones, like Beijing or Shanghai. And China could be offering more exchange programs with bilingual courses in German and Mandarin. I think both sides will keep working in the future to keep this cooperation flourishing.

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