Chapter 15
Chinese Parents’ Perspectives on International Higher Education and Innovation

Hiller A. Spires
North Carolina State University, USA

Kathryn E. Green
North Carolina State University, USA

Pengcheng Liang
Nanjing Normal University, China

ABSTRACT
Since the turn of the 21st century, international academic mobility (IAM) has greatly increased on the part of Chinese students, with many students choosing to study in colleges and universities abroad. This chapter reviews the literature related to Chinese students studying abroad and presents the results of a focus group study that investigated factors Chinese parents use when considering international higher education opportunities for their students as well as their perspectives on educational innovation. Results from the focus group indicate that parents value international educational experiences, believe technological advancement and innovation are keys to the future, desire rigorous, resource-rich educational opportunities for their children, and are concerned about financial needs and safety when their children attend universities abroad. Ongoing research of parents’ motivation and expectations regarding international higher education and innovation is needed since there is a continuing trend of Chinese students attending institutions of higher education outside of China.

INTRODUCTION
International academic mobility has greatly increased since the turn of the century in China (Cao, Zhu, & Meng, 2016) with parents playing a significant role in their children’s choice to study abroad (Louie, 2001). Multiple factors play into decisions to send children to institutions of higher education outside of
China. Within the educational context in China, this chapter synthesizes the literature on international academic mobility, cultural foundations of East and West, the role that socioeconomics and innovation play in higher education attendance, Chinese parents’ views on educational innovation, and the challenges that Chinese students face when studying in the West. Finally, the researchers report on the results of two focus groups with Chinese parents to directly address their ideas on international higher education and innovation.

**BACKGROUND**

With the People’s Republic of China’s continuing growth, both economically and politically, the country is positioned as a world power. Of particular note is China’s changing educational system, which is the largest in the world, with its 9-year basic education and 30% gross enrollment rate into higher education. The Ministry of Education (MOE) issued the Chinese Basic Education Curriculum Reform in 2001, which accompanied their goal of modernization and globalization as an economic development strategy. Through this reform mandate and others, the Chinese government is calling for a focus on innovation and creativity, decentralization in curriculum policy, student-centered teaching and learning, as well as inquiry-centered teaching pedagogies (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2002). Despite the focus on innovation and creativity in the educational system, many parents seek international higher education experiences for their children. There may be many reasons for this, including competition for admission to the best Chinese universities based on students’ performance on the national college entrance exam (gaokao), their family’s legal residency (hukou), and students’ financial resources (Michael, 2016; Choi, 2013). When making the decision to send their children abroad for higher education, the majority of families choose to send their students to Western universities, including but not limited to those in the U.S., Canada, and Australia (Fang & Wang, 2014; Schultz, 2015).

Following is a synthesis of the literature on international academic mobility in China, cultural foundations of East and West, the role that socioeconomics and innovation play in higher education attendance, Chinese parents support of innovative education, and the challenges that Chinese students face when studying in the West.

**International Academic Mobility as a Global Trend**

International academic mobility has increased greatly in the 21st century as many students choose to attend college abroad (Cao et al., 2016). Students attending college abroad can be a win-win situation for both educational institutions and students. Students gain international experience and colleges and universities see an increase in their international reputations as well as monetary gains (Cao et al., 2016). China is the largest source of international academic mobility with the number of Chinese students choosing to attend college abroad increasing by 20% annually since 2008 (Cao et al., 2016). Specifically, in 2015, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that 304,040 Chinese students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education (Chen & Jordan, 2015) with projected increases in upcoming years.

A push-pull framework is often used when discussing students’ interests in attending college abroad (see Gong & Huybers, 2015; Mazzarol & Souter, 2002; Yang, 2007). This framework differentiates between a “push” factor, which encourages the student to attend college in another country based on economic,