

# Chapter 8

## Massive Open Online Courses in China

**Xiaobin Li**

*Brock University, Canada*

### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the literature on massive open online course (MOOC) development in China, its accompanying practices, challenges, and opportunities. The chapter also offers recommendations derived from the literature on how to make MOOCs benefit more Chinese. To conduct this study, the author reviewed Chinese literature on MOOCs since 2012, when the first five articles on MOOCs appeared in Chinese journals, which introduced concepts and practices of Western MOOCs into China. The author also reviewed well-known English journals on online education and e-learning since 2013, when the first Chinese MOOCs appeared.*

### BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Zawacki-Richter, Bozkurt, Alturki, and Aldraiweesh (2018) analysed research on massive open online courses (MOOCs) by reviewing 362 empirical articles published in peer-reviewed journals from 2008 to 2015. They found that the MOOC literature generally focused on four lines of research: (a) the potential and challenges of MOOCs for universities, (b) MOOC platforms, (c) learners and content in MOOCs, and (d) the quality of MOOCs and instructional design issues. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2018) stated that their literature review was limited to English journals.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the Chinese and English literature on MOOC development in China, its accompanying practices, challenges, and opportunities. The chapter also offers recommendations derived from the literature on how to make MOOCs benefit more Chinese. English literature on Chinese MOOCs is quite limited, although China offers the most MOOCs in the world (Ministry of Education, January 15, 2018). In comparison there is a significant amount of Chinese literature on MOOC development in China. By summarizing the Chinese literature on MOOC development in China and present the summary and discussion in English, this chapter fills a gap in the English literature on MOOC research in the world.

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According to a statistical report on Chinese Internet development, by the end of June 2018, 802 million Chinese had used the Internet, which was about 57.7 percent of the population, with an increase of 3.8 percent over the end of 2017 (China Internet Network Information Center, 2018). As more Chinese used the Internet, the importance of it in education increased as well. Online education was provided to more learners. By the end of June 2018, approximately 172 million Chinese, 21.4 percent of those that had used the Internet, had received online education, with an increase rate of 10.7 percent over the end of 2017 (China Internet Network Information Center, 2018). In 2018 the market value of Chinese online education was approximately 170 billion yuan (about 27 billion dollars) (Lu, 2018). One important aspect of Chinese online education was MOOCs and over 10 MOOC platforms had been established in China (Ministry of Education, January 15, 2018).

To conduct this study, the author did a review of the Chinese and English literature on MOOCs in China. The Chinese academic journals the author reviewed included: *Open Education Research*, *Open Education Review*, *the Chinese Journal of ICT in Education*, *Distance Education in China*, and *Journal of Distance Education*. Chinese research articles on MOOCs, while growing, were still limited (Wan, Ye, Qi, Zeng, & Zhang, 2015). In 2012 the first five articles on MOOCs appeared in Chinese journals. These articles basically introduced concepts and practices of Western, mainly American and British, MOOCs into China (Yang, 2015). The author also reviewed well-known English journals on online education and e-learning since 2013, when first Chinese MOOCs appeared. These English journals included *American Journal of Distance Education*, *Distance Education*, *Journal of Educational Technology Development and Exchange*, *International Journal of Education & Development Using Information & Communication Technology*, *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, and *Computers in Human Behavior*, where gradually Chinese scholars started publishing their research articles and Western scholars also occasionally published articles on Chinese education. Most literature cited in this chapter was of Chinese origin. English literature on MOOCs in China was quite limited.

MOOCs began in China in 2013 in a few important universities. Peking University, Tsinghua University, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Science and Technology University, Fudan University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Nanjing University joined American MOOC platforms (Liu, 2015). In September 2013 nine instructors at Peking University participated in designing and providing MOOCs (Wang & Wang, 2015). In October 2013 Tsinghua University launched its Chinese MOOC platform (Liu, Sun, Wang, & Wei, 2015).

In April 2015, the Chinese Ministry of Education promulgated a document entitled, “Directive on the building and administering of open online courses provided by higher education institutions”. The Directive instructed universities to facilitate the growth of MOOCs by doing seven things. These seven things were: 1) Establishing quality open online courses, especially MOOCs, that provide learning support; 2) recognizing a group of national quality open online courses; 3) building public open online course support platforms; 4) promoting the provision of open online courses; 5) standardizing the introduction into China of international open online courses and the promotion of Chinese open online courses overseas; 6) strengthening the education of open online course instructors and technicians for building these courses; and 7) promoting innovation in recognizing and managing open online courses. At the same time, the Ministry of Education (2015) would provide policy analysis, macro direction, and favorable conditions for building open online courses and their public service platforms. Provincial departments of education and universities should design policies that take into consideration their specific circumstances (Ministry of Education, 2015).

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