

WCES-2010

# The influence of internationalisation of higher education: A China's study

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Received November 12, 2009; revised December 2, 2009; accepted January 22, 2010

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## Abstract

China opened its market to the world after it entered The World Trade Organisation (WTO) at the turn of the last century. The internationalisation of China's higher education not only influence the local educational system, but also impacts on that of other countries, thereby producing an open market that is likely to be shared with International education providers. The purpose of this paper is to analyse current features and trends in international cooperation in China's higher education, and attempts to address the reasons for the marketability of cooperative programs in China.

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*Keywords:* Cooperative programs; higher education; internationalisation; challenges; opportunities.

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## 1. Introduction

China opened its market to the world after it entered The World Trade Organisation (WTO) at the turn of the last century. Strong competition at the global level for innovative talents is forcing China's education sector to adopt new ideas and contemporary operational models in order to stay competitive. China's higher educational institutions are expected to play an important role in this process. How to improve the internationalisation quality of China's higher education and the educational quality of overseas programs facing the challenges of internationalisation of higher education in China has been a major concern of both the Chinese government and the education sector. The internationalisation of China's higher education not only influences the local educational system, but also impacts on that of other countries, thereby producing an open market that is likely to be shared with international education service providers (ESPs).

The Chinese Ministry of Education recently reviewed a series of policies about international cooperation in higher education with foreign countries in an effort to standardise their practice through centralised control. With an open market policy, a huge population base and increased economic advancement, there is an immense market and

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opportunity for higher educational development in China (Chen, 2002). Some obvious features and phenomena have changed in China's higher education. On the one hand, more and more China's students study overseas. China is currently the major exporting country of overseas students in the world. The tuition fees of China's students studying overseas were worth several billion US dollars in 2002 (Qianlong 2002). This is an obvious potential market for international education service providers (ESPs). On the other hand, an increasing number of overseas students are pursuing degrees in China. It is also becoming an important host country for international students. In the meantime, some China's universities have started to restructure their curricula and are actively seeking collaboration with overseas institutions (Xinhuanet 2001). They wish to gain input from the world-class educational experiences and provide better education services to China's students. Therefore, the internationalisation of China's higher education not only influences the local educational system, but also impacts on that of other countries, thereby producing an open market that is likely to be shared with International ESPs.

## 2. The current situation of China's higher education

By 19 June 2009, China had established 2317 higher educational institutions (EDU, 2009) including 1983 governmental and 334 private institutions. Now, the international education in China can be divided into three forms including cooperative programs, joint schools and joint universities.

### 2.1. Cooperative programs

Ten years ago, the first cooperative program was run by Tianjin University of Finance and Economics in China and Oklahoma City University in the United States (Liang, 2004). Table 1 shows the 119 approved cooperative programs that existed in 2007 between China's and overseas universities in descending order. The top six countries offering these programs: were UK (32), Australia (26), the United States (26), Hong Kong (12), Germany (5), and Canada (5).

Table 1. The Cooperative Programs in China by September 2007

PROGRAM	UK	Aus	USA	HK	Ger	Can	Fra	NZ	Neth	Jap	Austria	Rus	Swe	SUM
Bachelor	26	18	12	1	4	3	2	3	2	1	1	1		74
Master or above	6	8	14	11	1	2	2						1	45
TOTAL	32	26	26	12	5	5	4	3	2	1	1	1	1	119

Note: Aus = Australia, Can = Canada, Fr = France, Ger = Germany, HK = Hong Kong, China, Jap=Japan, Neth = Netherlands, NZ = New Zealand, Rus=Russia, Swe=Sweden and UK = United Kingdom, USA = United States of America.

### 2.2. Joint schools

The joint schools established within China's higher education institutions by Chinese and international ESPs is the second form. More than 20 joint schools have been established within China's higher education institutions (JSJ 2007a). They have been located in 9 different areas including Liaoning (5), ChongQing (3), ShangHai (3), GuangDong (2), ShanXi (2), BeiJing (1), TianJing (1), and HeBai (1) (see Table 2).

### 2.3. Joint universities

The joint universities ventured by China's universities and overseas ESPs. Two joint universities have been approved so far. The University of Nottingham Ningbo, China (Nottingham) is the first Sino-Foreign university in China with approval from the Chinese Ministry of Education (Ye & Zhang 2006, Nottingham 2007), which has been launched in Autumn 2004 (UNNC 2004). It is sponsored by the City Council of Ningbo, run by the University of Nottingham UK with cooperation from Zhejiang Wanli University, China (Nottingham 2007). Nottingham has provided master programs in 2007.

The Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) is the second joint universities in China. It was officially established in May 2006 (Li 2007a). XJTLU is established in partnership between Xi'an Jiaotong University, China and the University of Liverpool, United Kingdom, which currently provides 6 programs including Mathematics with

Finance, Communications Engineering, Electronic Science and Technology, Computer Science and Technology, Information and Computer Science, and Information Management and Information Systems (XJTLU 2007). XJTLU offers only bachelor degree programs so far.

Table 2: The Distribution of International Programs

	Location	Uni.	Sch.	M.	B.	Sum
1	HeNan		2	1	33	36
2	ZheJiang	1		10	12	23
3	LiaoNing		5	5	13	22
4	GuangDong		2	5	4	11
5	BeiJing		1	7		8
6	TianJing		1	1	4	6
7	ShannXi			5	1	6
8	ChongQing		3	3		6
9	FuJian			1	4	5
10	ShangHai		3	1		4
11	HuBei			4		4
12	HeBei		1		2	3
13	SiChuan			2	1	3
14	ShanXi		2			2
15	JiangSu	1				1
16	JiangXi			1		1
17	GuiZhou			1		1
18	ShanDong				1	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>142</b>

Uni. stands for University.

Sch. Stands for School.

M. stands for Master or above

B. stands for Bachelor

(Note: Data collection from JSJ 2007, JSJ 2007a)

### 3. The demand-driven/benefits analysis

Figure 1 illustrates the input-output (IO) influencing change in China's higher education. There are four demands driven China to open its educational market. With the current situation these driving forces are likely to remain for a long period of time. It is foreseeable that China's higher education market would be more opened in the near future. As a result, more and more international ESPs are likely to enter China's huge higher education market.

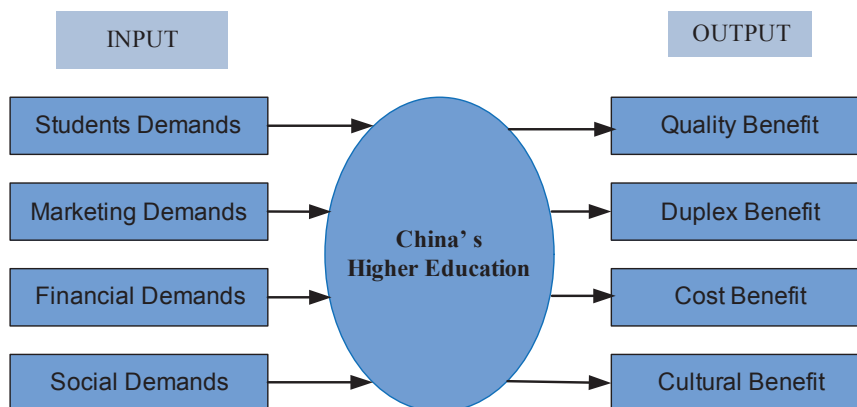


Figure 1. The demand-driven IO benefit model of the internationalisation of China's higher education

- The first input of growth comes from student's demands.

Students are always quick to respond to the business demands in human resources markets. Students want to obtain the latest career skills and training to improve their competitive capacity and increase career opportunities. Therefore, more and more China's students want to study in developed countries. This pressure from students, in turn, pushes the China's universities to improve their educational quality and catch up with the recent advances in higher education. The Chinese Ministry of Education recognises that China's higher educational institutions need to reform curricula, teaching materials, teaching methods, and examination and assessment tools by incorporating international experience into their programs (Chen, 2002b). In fact, China's higher educational institutions have benefited from this movement by optimising the program structures and promoting new teaching methods (Liang, 2004).

- The second driving demand input is the globalisation of the education market.

China's higher education is undergoing a transition from a one-way outflow (studying overseas) to a two-way education market. Until early 2000, this market can be seen as a one-way outflow in that Chinese students used to go to overseas for studying. It has been more than 100 years since China began to send its students and scholars to study abroad (MOE 2009a). This increased rapidly. In 2003, the total number of students and scholars studying abroad was 117,300 (MOE 2009a). In 2008, this number has reached to 179,800 (People's Daily Online 2009). However, the trend has been changed after 2000 significantly, which has become a two-way market. On the one hand, many international cooperative programs were extant in China that has provided opportunities for students to receive overseas higher education in China. On the other hand, the opening educational market may also attract overseas students to study in China. The first 33 overseas students came to study in China in 1950 (Lv, 2004). In 2003, totally 77,715 students of different types from 175 countries were accepted by 353 Chinese higher education institutions (MOE 2009b).

- The third input factor is financial demand.

Expensive tuition fees prevent many China's students from studying overseas. Cooperative programs may overcome the cost barrier. Cooperative programs provide an opportunity for those students who wish to access the educational resources offered by overseas higher educational institutions, but cannot afford to do it. They may reduce the cost of moving overseas for their education. A China's report (Liang, 2004) highlights the fact that cooperative programs can reduce the tuition fees by up to 75%.

- The fourth input is social demand.

From 1978 to the end of last year, the total number of Chinese students studying abroad reached 1.3915 million, Zhang Xiuqin, Director General for the Department of International Cooperation and Exchange under the Ministry of Education said that from the beginning of the reform and opening-up (1978) to the end of 2008, nearly 390,000 students returned to China after their studies abroad (People's Daily Online 2009). Zhang (People's Daily Online 2009) also highlighted that 62% of doctoral advisors, 75% of the academicians at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, 77.7% of the presidents of leading Chinese universities, and 84% of the academicians at the Chinese Academy of Sciences have had experience studying abroad. Some of them were awarded a PhD degree by overseas universities. Some have conducted their own research in overseas institutions as visiting scholars. This gave a good example for encouraging current Chinese students to study overseas.

#### **4. Challenges for cooperative programs**

In May 2007, the Chinese Ministry of Education announced the inception of the Eleventh Five-year Plan of China's National Educational Development" (Gov 2007). According to this plan, the Chinese government hopes to establish a few key universities and some disciplines that would be recognised internationally. This plan also encourages China's universities to strengthen their cooperation with overseas world-class reputable universities and research centers.

It appears that cooperative programs will continually play important roles in the internationalisation of China's higher education compared to other types of ESPs. However, some challenges and other issues have also appeared.

#### 4.1. Majority of cooperative programs failed in China

At present, a series of policies concerning cooperation in education has been established. From 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2003, all cooperative programs have to adhere to these regulations. They address three critical factors to assist in the standardisation of these programs as follows:

- The Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools that came into effect as of 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2003 is considered to be the most important set of regulations on cooperative education (JSJ, 2003).
- The Provisional Management Method of Higher Educational Institutions on Running a School Outside China came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2003 (MOE, 2003).
- The Notice about Strengthening the Management and the Awarding Degrees in Chinese-foreign cooperation used to run a School came into effect on 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 1996 (MOE, 1996).

More than 800 programs were being run in China (Liang, 2004). However, majority of these programs (85.13%, 681 of 800) have been cancelled by the Chinese government and are not anymore listed as cooperating institutions in running of higher education programs awarding foreign degrees.

The Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) regularly publishes this list in June and December each year. If a program is not on the list, it means the program is not likely to be approved by Chinese government and might not get official status. It is also likely to face problems in student recruitment and marketing. Whereas 169 programs were approved in 2004 (JSJ 2004), only 119 programs were approved in 2007. This clearly shows that the approval numbers were declined.

#### 4.2. The distribution of cooperative programs is too narrow

Currently the geographical distribution of programs is not even. The level of economic advancement in these areas varies significantly across China. There are 32 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities aside from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao in mainland China. Nearly half of provinces (41.94%, 13 out of 31) do not run any cooperative programs whereas 58.06% (18 out of 31) of areas run cooperative programs as noted in Table 2. Therefore, these areas provide potential markets for International ESPs.

By September 2007, the Chinese government had approved 142 international programs involving more than 13 countries including Hong Kong, China (HK) (see Table 1). These approved programs included 2 universities, 20 schools, 46 master including 1 doctoral, and 75 bachelor's programs.

#### 4.3. The scopes of these programs are very narrow

The focus of these programs is very narrow. Their scopes are also very narrow too. 26.67 % (12 out of 45) of cooperative master programs focus on master of business administration (MBA) or executive master of business administration (EMBA) programs (see Table 3).

On 6 August 2003, O'Hagan (2003) published an article entitled "MBA loses sway" in the Sydney Morning Herald, Australia. She noted that the iconic degree of the 80s would not guarantee a job today. The same situation also exists in China. The demand for the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs in China is also likely to decline. The MBA program would fulfil its objectives if it is changed from a broad coverage to a more focused approach. An MBA in hospital management and sports management are two such examples.

Another suggestion is to provide a greater variety of study disciplines. Agricultural technology, energy and environmental protection are highly preferred by the Chinese government (Gov 2007). In early 2004, Gide & Wu (2004, p.633) have highlighted that the Australia's experience in e-commerce programs might provide a proposal framework for developing e-commerce programs in China's higher educational institutions.

Others programs can also be considered, such as e-government, e-law, e-education, e-communication, e-trade, e-service, e-tax, e-banking, e-health, informatics, nursing and nursing management, hospital management, tourism management and hotel management. Realising such programs would require an expression of interest from China's most reputable universities in addition to Chinese government's support.

Table 3: MBA Programs

	Location	Master	MBA	%
1	ZheJiang	10	1	10.00%
2	BeiJing	7	1	14.29%
3	GuangDong	5	1	20.00%
4	ShannXi	5	3	60.00%
5	LiaoNing	4	2	50.00%
6	HuBei	4	1	25.00%
7	SiChuan	2	2	100.00%
8	JiangXi	1	1	100.00%
9	ChongQing	3		
10	FuJian	1		
11	ShangHai	1		
12	GuiZhou	1		
13	HuNan	1		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>26.67%</b>

(Notes: data collection from JSJ 2007a)

## 5. Limitations and Conclusions

With its accession to the WTO, China's higher education is bound to become more integrated into the international community (Yang, 2001). China's higher educational institutions are taking steps to catch up with the globalisation and internationalisation of education in terms of collaboration with overseas higher educational institutions. The influence of global forces on China's higher education system is likely to increase (Yang 2001).

The limitation of this research is that the data provided in this paper might be slightly different than the current one. The reason is that the original sources cited in this paper are from the official Chinese website. Many Chinese government websites do not provide the latest data on time. However, the strong evidence has posted that China's educators are addressing higher education in global terms. This marks the entrance of China's higher educational institutions into the international competitive market. There are four demand-inputs driving China to open its educational market to achieve the relevant benefit-outputs. The Chinese government also hopes to develop a few universities and some disciplines that would be recognised internationally. This plan also encourages Chinese universities to strengthen their cooperation with overseas world-class universities and research centers. It looks like cooperative programs will continue to play important roles in the internationalisation of China's higher education compared to international education providers.

This paper discusses the issues related to the internationalisation of China's higher education, and makes recommendations for Australian universities intend to enter the China's higher educational market successfully. The main argument has been discussed including majority of cooperative programs failed in China, the distribution of cooperative programs is too narrow, and the scopes of these programs are very narrow.

Many developed countries have exported their advanced higher education programs to China. It is predicted that the coverage of cooperative educational programs is likely to increase substantially. It is possible that more joint or cooperative schools or universities (rather than general cooperative programs) are likely to be established in the near future in China. The increasing demand will also affect international education providers.

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