

Internationalization of Higher Education in Mainland China: A Preliminary Analysis of Higher Education Models in Guangdong Province

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Abstract

As China moves toward a market system after the “reforms and opening-up” policy since the late 1970s, internationalization is receiving widespread attention at academic institutions in Mainland China. Today, there are more than 60 Sino-Foreign joint institutions (namely “Chinese-Foreign Higher Education Partnership”) operating within the Chinese nation. Despite the fact that the majority of these joint institutions have been developed since the 1990s, surprisingly little work has been published that addresses the roles, responsibilities, and challenges faced by the faculty and institutions on an operational level. How do we ensure the higher education models developed in the West can also work well in Mainland China? What are the incentives of adopting both Western and Chinese elements in higher education? In order to answer the aforementioned questions and to better navigate the diverse challenges and responsibilities on mapping internationalization in China, this paper provides a pragmatic framework to compare conventional Chinese curriculum with the “hybrid” Chinese-Foreign education model in present Guangdong province, China.

Keywords: *Internationalization in Higher Education, Chinese-Foreign Higher Education Institutions, Higher Education Models, Universities in Guangdong Province, China.*

The Chinese-Foreign Higher Education Partnership- commonly known as *Zhongwai Gaoxiao Hezuo Banxue* “中外高校合作办学” in Mandarin- has been a popular internationalization trend in Mainland China since the 1990s [1]. Despite the Chinese government does not create or publish any official definition for the term “internationalization”, but it has been frequently regarded as the expansion of institutional mission- in both scale and scope of the conventional higher education activities- through a process of international and intercultural integration into teaching, research and service functions of the university [2]. Today, there are at least 65 Chinese-Foreign Higher Education Institutions and 1,091 undergraduate programs presently operating within 28 Chinese provinces and municipalities in China, including Shanghai, Beijing, Chongqing, Tianjin, Shandong, Jiangsu, Henan, Zhejiang, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Guangdong, Hubei, Liaoning, Hebei, Hunan, Sichuan, Fujian, Jiangxi, Guangxi, Shaanxi, Anhui, Yunnan, Guizhou, Hainan, Gansu, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia [3]. In many instances, the majority of these joint institutions and programs are predominated by the Anglo-Saxon countries, which include United Kingdom (29%) and United States of America (17.4%); followed by the European countries such as France (10%) and Germany (10%). English-speaking learning environment and Western training services are thus created on Chinese campuses to address opportunities that range from international business to environmental engineering; while some universities have adopted American higher education system by offering a long list of general education courses to encourage critical inquiry and creativity [4].

Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College (UIC) is the first liberal arts college established in Guangdong province since 2003. As the first jointly found “hybrid” yet “international” higher education institution in Guangdong, English is used as its medium of instruction while the westernize Hong Kong’s curriculum was imitated to accommodate students’ learning needs within the Chinese-speaking context. Sun Yat-Sen University (SYSU), which is the earliest established university in Guangdong since 1924 by the father of modern China, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, has been a major top-tier conventional Chinese university located in Guangdong. In analyzing the curricula differences between the “hybrid” Chinese-Foreign higher education model and the conventional school, it is observed that one of the major differences between these institutions has lied in the curriculum structure of its credit value and learning modules. The recent SYSU’s study plan shows that 34 per cent out of the total credit hours are dedicated to non-major courses. This means that all the students are required to complete at least 33 credits under the category of “Public Compulsory Courses”, including two credits in “Chinese Language”, eight credits in “English”, four credits in “Physical



Education”, and 19 more credits in courses related to contemporary Chinese law, military, politics, and Chinese ideologies [5].

In addition to compulsory courses, all students at SYSU are required to complete 16 more credits for the general education courses. Its curriculum reveals that there are two sub-divisions of general education courses, namely “Core General Education Course” and “Normal General Education Courses”, of which each student at SYSU must take six to eight general education courses related to humanities, Chinese classical readings, economics and entrepreneurship [6]. At UIC, however, students are required to complete 72 credits or 55 per cent out of the total credit hours for their non-major courses, which is about 21 per cent higher than SYSU. Each student at UIC must complete 48 credit hours or 19 general education courses with respect to English language, music, numeracy, information technology, business, science, foreign languages, history, philosophy, law, government and society, religion, media, physical and emotional health, and whole person education before the graduation. In contrast to SYSU, the Chinese-Foreign higher education institution, i.e. UIC, places greater emphasis on intercultural and global dimension in its curriculum design. Unlike students at SYSU, students at UIC generally have a freedom to choose their free elective courses, while Chinese courses i.e. Marxism and Maoism are tentatively not including in the Chinese-Foreign institutional curriculum [7].

In 2018, there are 249,573 Bachelor’s degree holders graduated from 51 universities in Guangdong province [8]. Among these universities, there are two Chinese-Foreign higher education institutions producing employable graduates for jobs in and outside Guangdong province, of which including Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College (UIC) and Chinese University of Hong Kong at Shenzhen (CUHK Shenzhen) [9]. According to a local economic database, the provincial average salaries for a fresh graduate from both CUHK Shenzhen and UIC are ranked in the top one and the top six, out of 51 universities in Guangdong province. As shown in the following Table 1, fresh graduates from UIC receive close to 10 thousand euros annual salary; while CUHK Shenzhen- an institution which having their first generation of fresh graduates since the establishment in 2014- has achieved the highest annual paycheck up to 17.8 thousand euros within the Guangdong region.

If we compare the average annual salaries between two different models, 7,873 euros for fresh graduates from 49 conventional Chinese universities and 13,913 euros from two hybrid Chinese-Foreign universities, it is clear that the latter model produces students for better wages in the job market upon their completion. In addition, the annual salary’s ranking showing in Table 1 might have reflected the qualities and students’ personality characteristics with reference to the education models. Nevertheless, future studies are needed to address the degree to which employers thought about the model of higher education, and which one is better in preparing students for the work situation in and outside Guangdong province.

Graduates from Chinese-Foreign universities also show a higher motivation to attain postgraduate education outside China. Table 2 indicates that among 51 universities within the Guangdong province UIC has ranked the first in 2018 for having the highest percentage of graduates that go on further their studies in the overseas countries and adjacent regions. The overseas countries include United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore; and some graduates go on pursue the master’s degree in universities located in Hong Kong and Macao. Graduates from UIC comprise the largest proportions of study abroad in 2018 (68%), while among the students graduated from the conventional Chinese universities their percentage of further education is 13 per cent in average. In this light, it is clear that the Chinese-Foreign higher education model can provide Chinese students a better chance to further their postgraduate studies overseas after acquiring international academic trainings and English speaking skills in China.

Table 1: Top 10 Highest Annual Salary for Fresh Graduates in Guangdong Province, 2018 [10]

Rank	Institution	Annual salary (¥)	Annual salary** (€)
1	The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen*	137,500	17,875
2	Sun Yat-sen University	103,104	13,404
3	Southern University of Science and Technology	94,368	12,268
4	South China University of Technology	88,452	11,499
5	Jinan University	83,412	10,844
6	Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College (UIC)*	76,536	9,950
7	Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts	75,954	9,874
8	South China Normal University	75,374	9,799
9	Shenzhen University	71,268	9,265
10	Guangdong University of Foreign Studies	69,828	9,078

Note*: Chinese-Foreign Higher Education Institution.

Note**: The average annual salaries in CNY were converted to EUR according to the international exchange rate 1: 0.13 on May 15, 2019.

Table 2: Best Ranking Universities in Further Education within Guangdong Province, 2018 [11]

Rank	Institution	Percentage (%)
1	Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College (UIC)	68
2	Southern University of Science and Technology	33
3	Sun Yat-sen University	18
4	Guangdong University of Foreign Studies	15
5	Jinan University	14
6	South China University of Technology	12
7	Shenzhen University	12
8	South China Normal University	6
9	Shantou University	5
10	Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts	5

Despite the prospective chances for getting better salary and postgraduate learning opportunities, many of the Chinese-Foreign higher education partnerships are facing diverse challenges in Mainland China. According to the standard measurement of *Higher Education Act* and *Measures on China-Foreign Higher Education Partnerships*, China's Ministry of Education has conducted three major terminations since 2010. The latest termination was adopted in June 2018, of which 229 joint-venture Chinese-Foreign undergraduate programs and four Chinese-Foreign higher education institutions had been terminated in perpetuity due to the following reasons: (1) poor quality in teaching; (2) skyrocketing fees, and (3) poor teaching outcomes such as low rate of job employment and fail to attain further education opportunities among their graduates [12]. Table 3 reveals the name and location of the terminated Chinese-Foreign universities in 2018.

Table 3: Terminated Chinese-Foreign Higher Education Institutions in June 2018 [13]

Location	Institution	Partnership	Year of Establishment
Langfang City, Hebei Province	University of International Business and Economics Fort Hays State University	USA	2001
Qinhuangdao City, Hebei Province	Hebei Normal University of Science & Technology Medicine Hat College	Canada	2002
Xi'an City,	XJTU-HKUST Joint	Hong Kong	2014



Shaanxi Province	School of Sustainable Development at Xi'an Jiaotong University		
Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province	Shanxi Agricultural University Anhalt University of Applied Sciences	Germany	2002

Figure 1 below indicates that 160 Chinese-Foreign undergraduate programs or 70 per cent out of the total termination are located in northern China, while 74 or 32 per cent of undergraduate programs had ceased in operation in southern China in June 2018. In Guangdong province, there were four joint venture Chinese-Foreign undergraduate programs had been terminated, including the “Program on Economics and Finance” organized by Peking University-Hong Kong University, “Program on International Accounting Business” organized by Guangzhou University-James Cook University of Australia, “Program on International Trade” by Sun Yat-sen University-Jean Moulin University Lyon 3, and the “Program on Senior Management, Logistics and Supply Management” by Tsinghua University-Chinese University of Hong Kong [14]. Interestingly, these terminated programs were business and economic-oriented subjects, and these are the subjects being accused of cooperating with diploma mills since the first termination in 2010 [15].

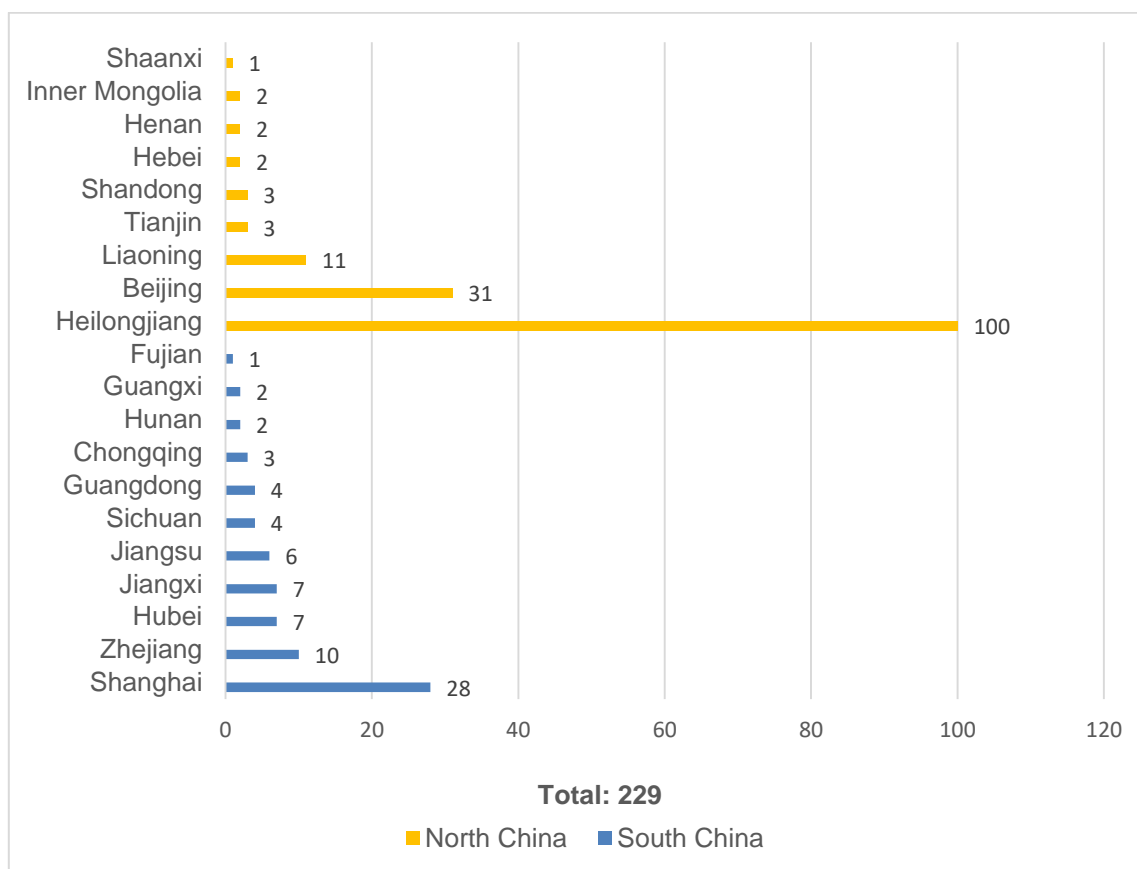


Figure 1: Terminated Chinese-Foreign Undergraduate Programs in Mainland China, 2018 [16].

Note: The northern and southern part of China is usually determined based on the Qinling Huaihe Line 34°N.

Over the past two decades, the numbers of Chinese-Foreign undergraduate programs and universities have greatly increased across many provinces in Mainland China. This implies that in China there has been a growing importance of English as the medium of distribution and instruction of knowledge in the internationalization of curricula in higher education institutions. Although the graduates from these internationalize Chinese-Foreign universities are more likely to attain better wages and postgraduate

learning opportunities in the overseas countries, but the driving forces behind the development of Chinese-Foreign higher education partnerships lies not only in such incentives. The regular terminations towards the Chinese-Foreign higher education partnerships clearly indicates that there are pressing problems within the “hybrid” Chinese-Foreign education model. To make sure this model can develop well in Mainland China, Chinese-Foreign higher education partnerships should avoid diploma mills but carry out quality teaching strategies to make impressive shifts in student performance. Meanwhile, further research and pedagogical studies are also needed to address the advantages of covering both multilingualistic and intercultural dimension in higher education institution, and how well it can be a mechanism for facilitating the internationalization and quality teaching of the higher education system in China.

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- [6] Ibid.
- [7] The data are compiled by authors from UIC’s database.
- [8] Official database of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China.
- [9] There are seven Chinese-Foreign institutions can be found in Guangdong Province today. However, the other five institutions are newly established Chinese-Foreign universities since 2015, and the first-generation of undergraduates are still completing their bachelor’s degree studies.
- [10] The data are compiled by authors from 21jingji.com, literally “economic network of the 21st century”.
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