

One Province, Two Education Models: Employers' Views of Graduates Produced by Both Conventional and Chinese- Foreign Universities in Guangdong Province, China

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Abstract

Presently, there are nine Chinese-Foreign universities marked with “legal person status (法人资格 in Chinese)” by the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China. These nine higher education institutions are the leading Chinese-Foreign universities in China, of which four of them are located in Guangdong province. By 2019, Chinese-Foreign universities in Guangdong province had produced eleven cohorts of graduates. It has been suggested in recent studies that, on average, these graduates enjoy a relatively higher salary in the first year of their employment compared to those who graduated from conventional Chinese universities. Does this imply that Chinese employers tend to value graduates produced by the Chinese-Foreign universities over those from conventional Chinese universities? Have the qualities sought in potential employees changed among Chinese employers? While the objectives of Chinese-Foreign universities have been understood as a more internationalized higher education institutions, little work has been published to address whether internationalized Chinese-Foreign universities give an education that is more relevant to society and industrial needs in Mainland China. In the eyes of Chinese employers, what are the qualities and skills of employees they are currently looking for in China’s labor market? To answer the questions mentioned above, a survey with 100 first-line recruiters from 30 different industries in Guangdong province, China, has been conducted and examined in this paper.

Keywords: *Chinese-Foreign universities, conventional Chinese universities, starting salary, personal quality, Guangdong province*

Chinese-Foreign universities have been a popular trend of internationalization in Mainland China since the 1990s [1]. According to the Interim Provisions for Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools enacted in 1995, legal person status is granted to establish cooperative educational institutions independently, and the granted institution shall assume the responsibility of running education independently [2]. In 2003, the promulgation of the “Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools” continuously granted Chinese-Foreign universities with legal person status to set up an independent board of trustees or board of directors [3]. Hence, this type of international higher education cooperation, as argued by Jane Knight, allows a high level of autonomy to the co-developed institution since the institution will not operate as a satellite branch of its parent institutions [4]. Currently, nine Chinese-Foreign universities marked with legal person status have been established across Mainland China, including University of Nottingham Ningbo China, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, New York University, Shanghai, Duke Kunshan University, Wenzhou-Kean University, Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University, United International College (BNU-HKBU UIC), Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Guangdong Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, and Shenzhen Moscow State University-Beijing Institute of Technology University, of which the latter four are located within Guangdong province. In addition to the four Chinese-Foreign universities, 61 conventional Chinese universities are located in Guangdong province [5].

In 2019, there were 1,858 and 256,930 bachelor’s degree holders graduated respectively from Chinese-Foreign universities and conventional Chinese universities in Guangdong province [6]. Recent studies have indicated that, despite being smaller in number, fresh graduates from Chinese-Foreign universities earn 77 per cent higher on average in the first year of employment compared to those of conventional Chinese universities [7]. What kinds of qualities and skills of fresh graduates are presently more valued by Chinese employers? Does this also reflect that there has been a change of personal qualities sought by Chinese employers while recruiting their potential employees? Moreover, is there any tendency to show that fresh graduates produced by Chinese-Foreign universities generally deserve and enjoy a higher starting salary concerning the English training and academic strength they attained? In order to answer the questions mentioned above, a survey was conducted during the “2020 Guangdong Province Recruitment Fair for Fresh Graduate and Urgently-Needed.



Talents” hosted by BNU-HKBU UIC on October 13, 2019. Through distributing questionnaires at the venue, more than one hundred opinions have been collected.

In the survey, our respondents are coming from 105 companies in different cities within Guangdong province, including Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Zhuhai, Zhongshan, Dongguan, Shaoguan, Enping, Jiangmen, Taishan, Kaiping, and Qingyuan. These companies belong to 30 industries, of which the most significant group comprises companies from the manufacturing industry (25%). It is followed by education (9%), information technology (8%), electronics (7%), new resources and new materials (6%), and retailing services (6%). Most of the respondents have engaged in the fresh graduates’ recruitment process in the previous one to ten years, and over 50 per cent of them have accumulated at least five years’ working experience as front-line recruiters for their companies.

According to the responses we collected, there are six qualities of competent fresh graduates hugely anticipated by the majority of Chinese employers, in which the most anticipated one is the ability to learn. Figure 1 below shows that 84 per cent of respondents prefer candidates possessing this characteristic. This figure also tells us that the second most anticipated working quality is a strong sense of responsibility (81%), following by adaptability (78%) and self-motivation (62%). Besides, results suggest that Chinese employers in the present time are looking for candidates with high passion for the industry or profession of which they are applying (57%). Chinese employers seek honest candidates, especially individuals who possess strong moral principles and personal integrity (52%).

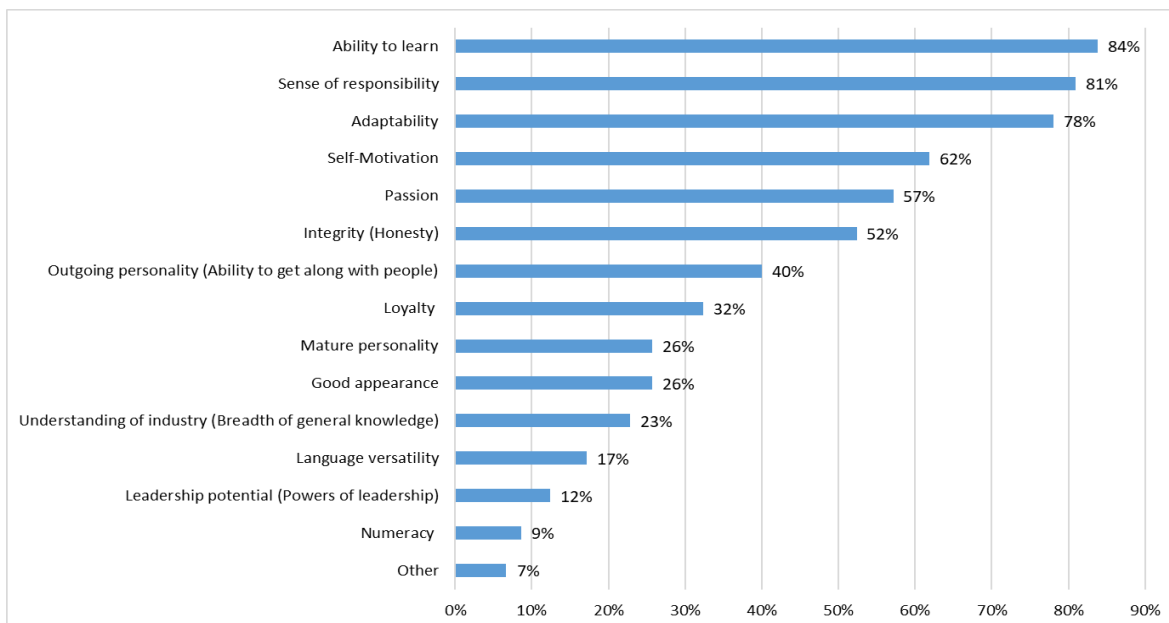


Figure 1: Specific qualities of fresh graduates favored by Chinese employers.

By comparing the surveys of personal qualities on fresh graduates we collected since October 2019 with the previous surveys, there is a significant change occurring in the recruitment plan among some Chinese employers in Mainland China. Chinese scholars have begun their studies on the same subject since the beginning of the twenty-first century. For instance, Peking University conducted its nationwide survey on fresh graduates’ employment and recruitment strength in the job market, respectively, in 2003 and 2005. These previous studies show that most Chinese employers have not yet anticipated the personal qualities of each fresh graduate. Personal qualities, as we mentioned earlier (i.e., ability to learn), a strong sense of responsibility, adaptation, self-motivation, passion, and honesty, were not required in the workplace back in 15 years ago. Instead, Chinese employers were usually looking for potential candidates based on their academic performance, particularly the scores each candidate attained in his/her grade point average (GPA) [6]. A Chinese survey conducted in 2007 indicates that active participation in extra curriculum activities and volunteering social works and services would increase students’ competitiveness in the Chinese job market after graduation [8]. As in 2013, a survey further indicated that there had been an evident tendency among Chinese employers to recruit fresh graduates who engaged actively in student leadership and organizations like sports clubs and other social work and services [9] [10]. Such changes have marked an increasing preference among Chinese employers toward the personal qualities of fresh graduates. Chinese



employers have seen student participation in student clubs and activities as a reference to measure strong leadership and desirable personal qualities. At the same time, some scholars also inferred that fresh graduates equipped with such abilities are more likely to receive a higher starting salary in their first job [11].

Inspired by the precious Chinese studies, it is crucial to examine further whether higher starting salaries among fresh graduates from Chinese-Foreign universities are attributed to their strong personal qualities shaped by the international learning curriculum and English speaking environment. In this paper, our respondents were asked to consider and compare nine personal qualities of fresh graduates from Chinese-Foreign universities with the conventional Chinese universities in China (see Table 1 and Figure 2 below). In general, our respondents can be divided into two groups: Group A and B. Group A includes 51 respondents who used to recruit fresh graduates from both types of the university. Group B, on the contrary, are 53 respondents who used to recruit fresh graduates only from conventional Chinese universities in the past, of which last October was their first time to recruit potential fresh graduates from a Chinese-Foreign University, BNU-HKBU UIC. We discovered that 88 per cent of Group A recruiters were aware of the differences between students trained by Chinese-Foreign universities and conventional Chinese universities. Referring to Figure 2, 56 per cent of these respondents consider fresh graduates produced by Chinese-Foreign universities more confident than their counterparts trained in the current Chinese educational context.

Meanwhile, the respondents also generally believe that the students trained by Chinese-Foreign universities are more creative (40%) and show more diversified personalities (36%) than the fresh graduates from conventional Chinese speaking universities. However, only a small number of recruiters in Group A think that fresh graduates trained by Chinese-Foreign universities have stronger self-motivation (20%) and leadership potential (7%) than the students in conventional Chinese universities. In this sense, it can be inferred that Chinese employers have seen the Chinese-Foreign university graduates' as less motivated or less competent candidates for the current Chinese workplaces.

| Personal qualities of fresh graduates | No. |
|--|-------|
| Students from Chinese-Foreign universities are more able to adapt to an industrial environment | Bar 1 |
| Students from Chinese-Foreign universities are more confident | Bar 2 |
| Students from Chinese-Foreign universities are more creative | Bar 3 |
| Superior environment at Chinese-Foreign universities produces many differences in personal qualities | Bar 4 |
| Students from Chinese-Foreign universities have greater leadership/management potential | Bar 5 |
| Students from Chinese-Foreign universities are better at logical and analytical thinking | Bar 6 |
| Students from Chinese-Foreign universities have a more mature outlook | Bar 7 |
| Students from Chinese-Foreign universities have greater motivation | Bar 8 |
| Students from Chinese-Foreign universities are more 'socially complete' | Bar 9 |

Table 1: Personal qualities of fresh graduates.

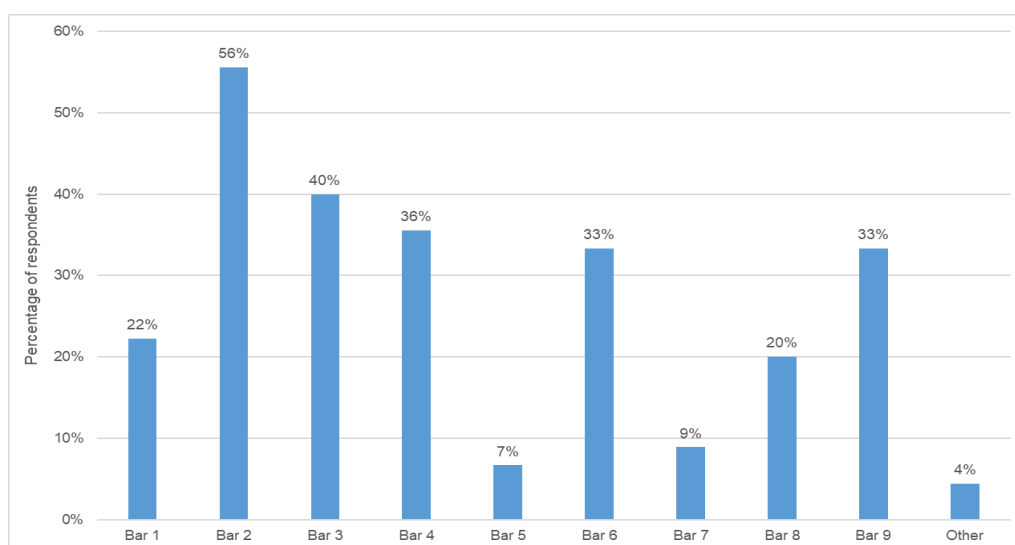


Figure 2: Group A recruiters' observation of the personal qualities of fresh graduates.



In order to obtain how far the recruitment experiences have affected the Chinese employers' expectations concerning the personal qualities of fresh graduates from Chinese-Foreign universities, Figure 3 below compares Group A's and Group B's expectations of the nine personal qualities listed in Table 1. As illustrated in Figure 3, recruiters in Group A tend to anticipate more qualities concerning self-motivation (bar 8) and leadership potential (bar 5) among the fresh graduates produced by Chinese-Foreign universities compared to those in Group B. A Figure 3 also demonstrates that the majority of Group B's recruiters prefer to hire fresh graduates from conventional Chinese universities since they have less experience in recruiting fresh graduates at Chinese-Foreign universities. However, recruiters of Group B have generally attained higher expectations toward the fresh graduates from Chinese-Foreign universities than Group A. This tendency might be attributed to the more potent abilities among the fresh graduates trained in Chinese speaking universities. The abilities include their adaptability and competency in industrial, management, and social environment in China.

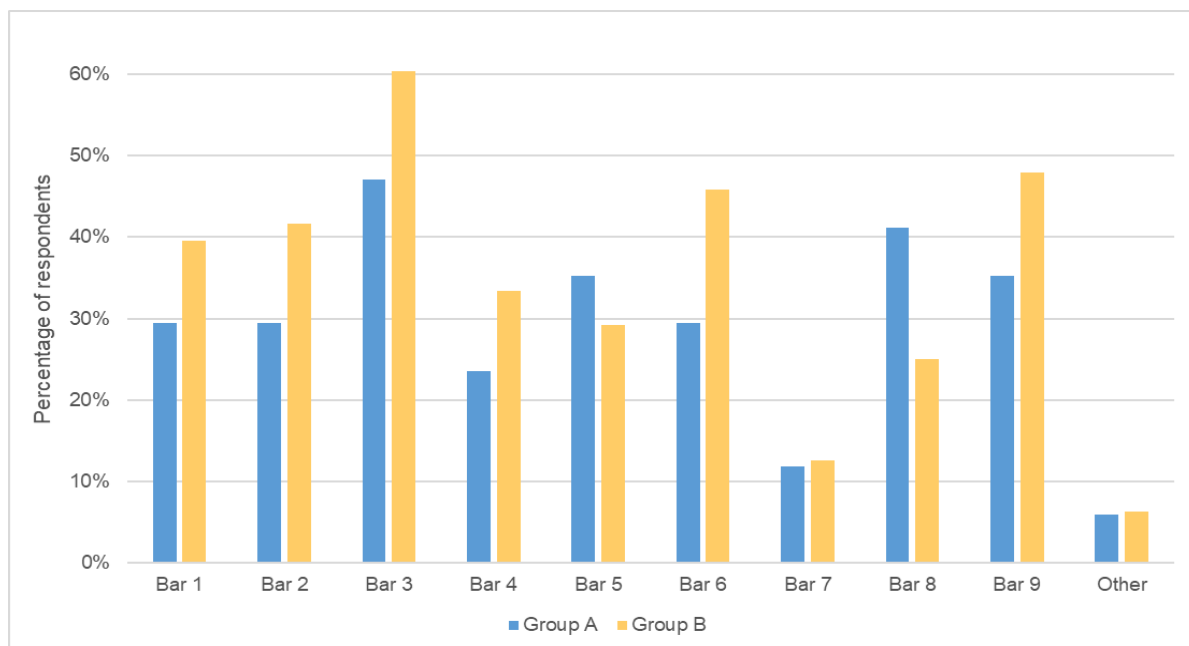


Figure 3: Group A's and Group B's expectations of the personal qualities of fresh graduates.

Finding a job after graduation has been one of the major themes of higher education in China. In this paper, our survey aims to provide some new insights into this theme by comparing two educational models that are presently prevailing in Guangdong province since the early twenty-first century: Chinese-Foreign universities and conventional Chinese universities. Based on our preliminary analysis, it is apparent that many Chinese employers are more inclined to recruit fresh graduates with the following outstanding personal qualities, particularly the ability to learn, a strong sense of responsibility, adaptability, self-motivation, passion, and integrity. Besides, our survey reveals that Chinese employers appreciate the confidence, creativity, and diverse personality of fresh graduates trained by Chinese-Foreign universities. At the same time, they further expect a strong self-motivation and leadership potential from these graduates. Noteworthy, their high expectation toward fresh graduates from Chinese-Foreign universities is held by recruiters who have not yet hired any employees from these universities. The higher expectation implies that despite the tendency for recruiters to possess strong confidence toward the Chinese-Foreign universities and its fresh graduates, the confidence may have been coming from the worldwide reputation of the foreign higher education institutions rather than the individual personal qualities. Therefore, Chinese-Foreign universities need to nurture strong personal qualities for their students, especially with respect to social adaptability, industrial competency, and leadership skills within the working environment across China because the school's reputation will not produce a sustainable and competitive advantage for their graduates in the long run.

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