

Learning from and Breaking Through: The Current Situation, Problems and Countermeasures of Sino-foreign Cooperation in Higher Education

Zhirong Chen

School of Ningbo Nottingham University, Ningbo, 31500, China

Abstract

Sino-foreign cooperative institutions are an important practice in the development of China's internationalization of higher education. This emerging education system still has many issues that need to be considered and resolved. This article analyzes the current problems faced by Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools, and proposes some feasible solutions based on relevant data and the status quo of Sino-foreign cooperation in education.

Keywords

Higher Education; Sino-foreign Joint Venture; International Education.

1. Introduction

Sino-foreign cooperative education is a new product of the gradual development of higher education in China. Sino-foreign cooperative education is not only an important practice of cultural exchange, but also an important component to promote the development of the Belt and Road Initiative in China. However, since 2020, affected by the COVID-19, Sino-foreign cooperation in higher education has suffered a great impact. Take the University of Nottingham Ningbo as an example, the admission scores of the University of Nottingham Ningbo in 2020 has dropped in different degrees compared to the admission scores of 2019 in all provinces and cities. [1] For Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools, some problems have become more prominent under the epidemic. Rather than the epidemic, it is more likely that the Sino-foreign cooperative institutions themselves have certain problems that have caused the enrollment dilemma in these institutions. This paper analyzes the problems of Sino-foreign cooperative education and proposes countermeasures to improve the quality and efficiency of Sino-foreign cooperative education through studying the cases of internationalization of higher education in other countries.

2. Problems of Sino-foreign Cooperation in Higher Education

2.1. The Quality of Schooling Needs to Be Strengthened

The quality of teaching is very high in Sino-foreign cooperative education. Teachers of Sino-foreign cooperative schools should not only have profound professional background, but also need to be able to teach in English. There is a clear difference between bilingual teaching and English teaching in general universities and professional English teaching. Unfortunately, there are not many teachers who have the expertise and proficiency to teach in English. English teachers may not be qualified to teach professional subjects, and teachers of professional studies may not necessarily be proficient in using English to impart knowledge. Hence, it is difficult to meet the needs of teachers who are qualified to teach in Sino-foreign cooperative schools. According to the survey results of Xinxin Wu and Xiaoqing Yan, over 80% of the surveyed students enrolled in Sino-foreign joint universities were dissatisfied with their

teachers' English expressions, such as inaccurate pronunciation, lack of fluency in speaking, and monotonous classroom atmosphere. [2] These are the most fundamental quality problems faced by Sino-foreign cooperative higher education institutions: that is, the lack of a faculty team that matches their bilingual quality. How to build a high quality teaching team and how to cultivate it is a question that needs to be thought about.

2.2. Conflict Between Public Interest and Profitability

Profit is the primary motivation of all for-profit internationalization programs and some traditional non-profit universities with financial problems. Such a primary motivation is quite different from the purpose of cultivating high-level talents in Chinese higher education institutions. In recent years, the number of foreign universities cooperating with China for the top 500 universities in the world is about 120, accounting for only about 15% of the total; in the "Regulations on Chinese-foreign Cooperative Education" formulated by the State Council, it is pointed out that "the essence of Chinese-foreign cooperative education is to introduce foreign quality educational resources, but in the specific operation, the pursuit of economic interests makes it difficult to ensure the quality of education." [3] According to the data, in many Sino-foreign cooperative institutions and projects, the quality of some foreign universities introduced is relatively low, which leads to the introduction of disciplines of professional level can not be guaranteed, and some Sino-foreign joint universities have created a gimmick of imported education that is not of high quality in order to make profits by charging high fees without regard to the quality of higher education institutions. This is not only contrary to the original intention of introducing foreign educational resources in China, but also contrary to the public welfare nature of higher education institutions in China. In fact, it is not forbidden to increase the cost of introducing higher education. Owing to differences in exchange rates and consumption levels in various countries, higher education institutions introduced will charge higher fees. However, when the nature of Sino-foreign cooperative higher education institutions becomes purely profit-making, it becomes a contradiction that needs to be solved and adjusted.

2.3. Social Recognition Needs to Be Improved

China has a clear classification of the quality of traditional higher education institutions. Students are ranked according to their college entrance examination results to enter the corresponding higher education institutions for further study. However, in the case of Sino-foreign cooperative programs, the criteria for admission are ambivalent. Since the tuition fees of Sino-foreign cooperative programs are much higher than those of other domestic programs, parents and students easily link the perception of higher fees to an easier access to diplomas and degrees, leading to the impression that Sino-foreign cooperative higher education is not a high quality and high standard higher education in the society. Therefore, except for students with a clear goal of going abroad and better grades, they generally do not choose such Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions. The most important thing is that there is less publicity for Chinese-foreign cooperative education. In the process of publicity, more schools use acquaintances to introduce themselves or contact themselves, etc. Many Sino-foreign cooperative colleges themselves are hardly to better publicize the school. Although now with the development of the Internet era, more and more schools are able to promote their schools through online media. However, the fact that schools still advertise through their internal websites and the fact that they require expensive tuition fees has led to a low level of recognition of Chinese-foreign cooperative schools among a larger number of students.

3. Practices of Internationalization of Higher Education in Other Countries

3.1. Internationalization of Higher Education in the UK

The internationalization of higher education in the UK is mainly presented in the form of export. By virtue of the superior educational resources of local institutions, the UK has gained the interest of other countries to cooperate and exchange. The quasi-managed market is also the basic form of operation of the internationalization of higher education in the UK. Although the internationalization of higher education in the UK is mainly in the direction of export, the UK has divided its higher education institutions into different types of international development. They divided the internationalization of higher education institutions into four categories: i. Emphasis on their Europeanization, along with an international student experience on their home campus. ii. Focus on developing co-teaching in several Asian countries. III. Aim to attract international students to the UK. iv. Highlights its research reputation with national and international rankings that it considers to be a major asset. [4] The clear division of labor among UK universities is an important reason why the internationalization of higher education in the UK has been able to form a more mature system. Such a division of labor system is worth analyzing and learning from most countries.

3.2. The Use of Internationalization of Higher Education in Thailand

Contrasted to the UK, the internationalization of higher education in Thailand is mainly importing. If international higher education in the UK is an "export product", for Thailand it is an "import product". Thai students want to learn more international knowledge from higher international education in order to adapt to the international market. In the Thai context, the additional demand for international programs is based on the growing demand for graduates with strong English language skills, which is a real need as foreigners are investing in Korea. Many Thai students come to international programs with the expectation that their English proficiency will improve, which will give them more and better job opportunities. English has always been considered important in the education systems of most countries in the world. Many Thai students come to international programs with the expectation that their English skills will improve, which will give them more and better job opportunities. English has always been considered important in the education systems of most countries in the world. However, Thailand's recent bottom ranking in English proficiency (53rd out of 54 countries) is a good example of the problems that need to be addressed by Thailand's international programs in higher education, which were established to achieve this goal. [5] However, such a goal is likely to create a homogenous international education in the country. More importantly, such a goal of higher education will eventually lead to the consolidation of classes and an exodus of human resources. Thailand's higher international education has now appeared an obvious problem of subject unification, and the direction of its training is not to meet the development needs of the country but to cater to the needs of other developed countries. This is the current situation of many developing countries in the face of international higher education, and the problems encountered in the internationalization of Thailand's higher education will also appear in other developing countries, which are worth reflecting on by other developing countries.

4. Countermeasures to Improve the Quality and Efficiency of Sino-foreign Cooperative Education in Higher Education

4.1. Build A Warranty Mechanism to Improve the Quality of Education

A large part of the reason why sino-foreign joint institutions of higher learning can have an impact in China is the cultural value of the sino-foreign joint institutions of higher learning.

According to cultural capital theory, the greater the cultural capital of an individual, the greater the advantage of acquiring additional capital; some individuals inherit cultural capital in the process of "habitus", which makes them more successful than others in the field of education system; while individuals with less cultural capital will encounter some limitations.[6] Inequality in cultural resources leads to unequal access to institutional resources, so people try to maximize their cultural capital as much as they can. Sino-foreign cooperation in education brings more cultural capital to individuals by providing international education and issuing double diplomas. This is the key to the initial attraction of Sino-foreign cooperative higher education by its own high quality and high cultural empowerment. However, due to the current decline in social recognition and the quality of education itself, restoring and improving the quality of teaching has become the most important issue that needs to be solved for Sino-foreign cooperative institutions. The best and fastest way to improve the quality of education is to improve the guarantee mechanism of its operation. The education authorities should build a quality assurance system for cross-border education that is in line with international standards and has Chinese characteristics. The most important thing is to develop an accreditation index system that is compatible with Sino-foreign cooperative education, so that there is a clear access system for Sino-foreign cooperative institutions of higher education and the quality of Sino-foreign cooperative institutions of higher education is the top priority.

3.2 Strengthen the Top-level Design and Highlight the Characteristics of School Running

One of the big problems of Sino-foreign joint higher education is that the disciplines are too single and the system is not perfect. Not having enough characteristics is a huge problem for Sino-foreign joint colleges. Because it does not have the support of campus history, and it does not have distinctive characteristics to compete with traditional and established universities. There is also a tendency for specialties to become homogeneous. Owing to the limitation of faculty strength and school size, the majors offered by Chinese-foreign cooperative colleges are not comprehensive. And because the Sino-foreign cooperative schools are still in the development stage, it is difficult to develop their own especial key majors in the short term. Hence, expanding the school's faculty and opening more professional courses are the problems that can be solved in the short term. In the long term plan, Chinese-foreign cooperative schools also need to start cultivating their own specialties. One of the advantages of Chinese-foreign cooperative schools compared with domestic ordinary colleges and universities is more sufficient funds for school construction. Sino-foreign cooperative schools can make good use of such advantages to create a better experimental environment and cultivate high-tech research-oriented majors. Such specialties will largely enhance the competitiveness and research strength of the school. Another major problem of Sino-foreign joint higher education is the lack of continuing education. There are very few master's degree programs in Sino-foreign universities, and most of the students who attend undergraduate programs in Sino-foreign universities choose to go abroad for further study during their postgraduate years. There is no higher level infrastructure and research conditions for students to pursue higher level education. To address this situation, we need to strengthen the top-level design of Sino-foreign universities. We should increase the number of postgraduate training sites in Sino-foreign universities as long as there are adequate basic facilities.

4.2. Deepen the Cooperation Between Government and School, and Grasp the Direction of Running A School

For a foreign organization, obtaining the support of the local government is a crucial part. Since the Chinese-foreign cooperative university itself lacks the support of the public, only by deepening the cooperation with the government can it obtain the resources needed for sustainable development. On the one hand, the government needs to strengthen its policy support for Chinese-foreign universities. On the other hand, Sino-foreign cooperative

universities need to ensure their own characteristics while also being closely linked to the CCP. The biggest taboo of Sino-foreign cooperative institutions and projects is the malformation of ideological roots. Sino-foreign universities should strongly support the leadership of the Communist Party of China and keeping in line with the Party Central Committee, which is the fundamental foothold for the integration of Sino-foreign universities into Chinese society. In particular, it is important to have a clear position when accepting foreign universities and foreign teachers for exchange and always keep in mind the purpose of education.

5. Conclusion

It has not been long since the development of Sino-foreign cooperative education in higher education. Whether the social recognition of Sino-foreign cooperative education or the Sino-foreign cooperative institutions themselves, there is a long way to go. Chinese-foreign cooperation in higher education is an important vehicle for higher education exchange. The significance of Chinese-foreign cooperation in higher education is not only to increase the diversity of education forms, but also to develop the cultural integration and the vision in talent cultivation. According to Trahar and Hyland, as individuals, we have a limited ability to grasp others who are different from ourselves, and it takes extra effort to transcend our own backgrounds and understand each other's cultures, and co-education is a low-risk way to understand other cultures. All in all, the development of Sino-foreign cooperation in higher education is an important and urgent matter. We look forward to the development of Sino-foreign cooperation in higher education, which will bring new vitality to the education sector.

References

- [1] Gkcx.eol.cn. 2021. 2021 college entrance examination volunteer reporting service platform | college entrance examination database |2021 college entrance examination major |2021 college entrance examination score | 2021 college entrance examination score line | university major | list of universities-China Education Online. [online] Available at: <<https://gkcx.eol.cn/school/1216/provinceline>> [Accessed 24 August 2021].
- [2] Chen, Y. and Han, Z., 2011. Bilingual Economics Education for Business Schools in Running Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Programme: A Perspective of Cross Culture Adjustment. 2011 International Conference on Management and Service Science.
- [3] Zhang, Q., 2021. Analysis of the Current Situation and Development Path of the Sino-foreign Cooperative Higher Education. *Meitan Higher Education*, 35(03), p.79.
- [4] Warwick, P., 2014. The international business of higher education – A managerial perspective on the internationalisation of UK universities. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 12(2), pp.91-103.
- [5] Lavankura, P., 2013. Internationalizing Higher Education in Thailand: Government and University Responses. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 17(5), pp.663-676.
- [6] Lee, J. and Bowen, N., 2006. Parent Involvement, Cultural Capital, and the Achievement Gap Among Elementary School Children. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), pp.193-218.
- [7] Trahar, S. and Hyland, F., 2011. Experiences and perceptions of internationalisation in higher education in the UK. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 30(5), pp.623-633.