

Importing quality higher educational resources through Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools

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Abstract: Importing quality higher education resources is the core mission of Chinese-foreign joint initiative in higher education as well as the key to improve the level of the cooperation initiatives. The paper reviews the history and current situation of the introduction of quality higher education resources through Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools. It scrutinizes the whole process of importing quality higher education resources and analyzes the main problems in the process about quality evaluation, resources import, joint management and quality assurance mechanism. On this basis, the paper attempts to analyze the development trend of the process and provides some suggestions.

Key words: Chinese-foreign cooperation; higher educational resources; quality assurance

1. The Significance of Importing Quality Educational Resource through Chinese-foreign Joint Initiative in Higher Education

“Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools refers to educational undertakings enrolling Chinese citizens as the main objectives and run by cooperative educational institutions established in cooperation with foreign bodies corporate, individuals and relevant international organizations and Chinese educational institutions and other social organizations with the status of a legal person”(SEC, 1995, Chapter 1: Article 2). As far as higher education concerned, quality educational resources mean educational programs of successful management experiences that are distinctive worldwide. It includes superior curricula, teaching method, administration system, assessment system, well-qualified faculty, and more effective way to cultivate talents.

2. Economic Globalization and the Internationalization of Higher Education Promote Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Higher Education

Since 1980s, the flourish of global economy and the wide application of high-tech information and communication technologies have been promoting the internationalization of higher education significantly. Economic globalization gives higher educational institutions all over the world opportunities and challenges as well. Schools must strength their international cooperation and communication, for one thing, internationalization

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is one of the apparent characters of higher educational institutions from the day they established; for another, higher educational institutions in present era have the urgency to improve their internationalization so that to meet domestic and international intense competition. In recent years, China also adopted active policy to promote the internationalization of its higher education, especially the liberalized policy toward Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools.

3. The Acceleration of China's Massification of Higher Education Requires Sino-foreign Joint Initiative in Higher Education

In recent years, China's higher education has been developing rapidly and achieved massification of higher education. The gross enrollment rate of higher education in China was less than 2% in the early 1980s and just 5% in the early 1990s. At the time when the center government decided to expand higher education enrollment in 1997, the number was still less than 10% (LAO Kai-sheng, 2006). However, from 1999 onwards, China's educational institutions have continuously expanded their enrollment significantly for seven years. The number of newly enrolled students was 1,083,600 in 1998, but this number increased about 4.7 times higher by 2005 to 5,040,000, an average annual increment of 21.35 percent, resulting in a total enrolment of 23 million, the largest volume in the world.

However, problems emerged and have been aggravated gradually when the availability of educational resources could hardly catch up with the growth in admission rates these years. For example, educational concept, personnel training style and teaching methods in China now should be reformed; professional quality of faculty be improved, the government funds provided to higher educational institutions lagged behind the expansion and development of the institutions so that lead to their financial shortfalls, etc. The deterioration of education quality not only hindered the development of mediocre educational institutions, but also "elite universities" which should have been doing high-quality academic research and world-class professional training. The root cause for the deterioration is the lack of proper way to solve the contradictions between the quantity and the quality of China's higher education resources, i.e. the increase of higher educational resources in China didn't keep up with the country's expansion of enrollment scale of higher educational institutions. In 1980s the student-teacher ratio was about 8 to 1, but by 2004 it had been raised to nearly 22 to 1 (21.98:1 for national universities and 21.23:1 for higher education institutes under various ministries). In 2004 the fixed asset for the national level 72 universities totaled 813 billion Yuan, while the amount for research purposes was 257 billion Yuan, a ratio of 3.2:1. Only a few universities such as the Tsinghua University had the ratio as low as 2:1, while some other national level universities reached 5: 1 or even 10: 1) (PAN Mao-yuan, 2007).

Consequently, China should transform its strategic focus from "scaling up" to "quality enhancement". In order to achieve this goal, China's 11th 'five-year' education plan instituted its objective of next five years as 'enhancing the quality of higher education'. At the meeting of the State Council which was held on 10 Jun 2006, Premier Wen Jia-bao pointed out that moderate control should be placed on the growth of the admission rate, and that the quality of education should be emphasized instead. For the enhancement of educational quality, high quality resources promoted through internationalization in university curriculum is increasingly viewed as necessary.

Importing quality higher education resources is the primary goal of Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools. China's government wants to import and assimilate international quality education resources and put

forward the China's higher education reform and cultivate plenty of elites to meet the need of the country's modernization through promoting transnational higher educational services in China.

4. Current Situation of Importing Quality Higher Educational Resources into China

In 2007, there were about 1400 educational organizations and projects found in 28 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in China which were established with foreign assistance, most of them are degree-awarding, but non-formal schools also possessed a considerable quantity, which mainly emphasized on vocational education and skills training.

Table 1 The type of current Sino-foreign joint education institutions

Independent Institutions		Non-independent Institutions			
Degree awarding	Non-degree	Joint program		Joint Secondary Colleges	
		Degree awarding	Non-degree	Degree-awarding	Non-degree

These organizations can be divided into 2 types: independent and non-independent.

Independent Chinese-foreign joint organization comprised investment by both Chinese and foreigners; it has the legal person status and independent campus. But since it is prohibited to provide transnational education solely by foreign institutions in China, the so called independent institutions are not absolutely independent and only refer to the independence of administration system of those organizations from relevant Chinese cooperative institutions. One of the obvious characters of these independent organizations is that they have the autonomy to design their own curriculum and choose curriculum materials and most of the administration and management of the schools are implemented through the broad committee of the schools. Taking the University of Nottingham in Ningbo province as an example, it is an incorporated body having individual campuses and curriculum. It practiced the Principal Responsibility System that is under supervision by a broadly representative committee, comprising eight Chinese and seven foreigners.

The non-independent Chinese-foreign joint organizations include two types: joint programs and joint secondary colleges.

Chinese-foreign joint educational programs are curriculum programs in which foreign education institutions cooperate with China's institutions located in mainland China to provide curriculum mainly to Chinese students and have neither independent campus nor independent administration. Furthermore, It is regulated in *The Implementation for the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* that the mode of Chinese-foreign cooperative branch campus also belongs to Chinese-foreign cooperative programs. One of the distinct features of branch campuses is that the whole educational scheme of the programs is worked out by Chinese and foreign educational joint institutions together and it is requested to import foreign high-quality educational resources indeed to carry out foreign curriculums and courses in China mainland. By June 2004 there are 164 joint higher educational programs qualified to award foreign degrees or the degrees of the universities in Hong Kong.

Chinese-foreign cooperative secondary colleges are Chinese-foreign joint colleges attached to Chinese joint universities. They have no independent legal status and are administrated mainly by China's joint universities which act as their legal representatives. The curriculum of the colleges are designed and carried out by Chinese and foreign joint institutions collaboratively. Currently, most of Sino-foreign cooperative institutions are this pattern, such as Sydney Institute of Language & Commerce of Shanghai that set up in 1994 and Jilin

University-Lambton College set up in 1999.

It is worth noting that not all Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools are performed by Chinese and foreign education institutions such as the Johns Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies; actually, some of joint programs are cooperated by China's governments with foreign higher educational institutions. Take China Europe International Business School as an example, it is a joint graduate institution founded by Shanghai municipal government and European Union in order to train Masters of Business Administration (MBA), Executive MBA, and provide Diploma in Management Program (DIMP); there are also some cooperated by foreign enterprises or individuals with China's enterprises or schools.

5. Major Issues of Chinese-foreign Joint Initiative in Higher Education

Recent years, with China's economy system transformed from the planned economy system characterized by centralized authorities and autarchy to the socialist market economic system which is distinct by responsibility sharing, system assurance and legal operation system, the system of Chinese-foreign joint initiative in higher education has also been changing and the service quality of Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools has been improving. However, the determinative factor of promoting the quality of the cooperation is to import quality higher educational resources and ensure their development and utilization by establishing appropriate mechanism and system. As far as the current situation of Chinese-foreign cooperation in running school is concerned, there have been several major issues occurred in the process of importing quality educational resources into Chinese-foreign joint schools.

First, the qualifications of foreign educational institutions are not ensured. It is true that the quantity of Sino-foreign joint programs and institutions has been increasing rapidly in recent years, but regarding its quality, in contrast with the fact that the vast majority of the joint degree programs are provided in Chinese leading institutions, most of the foreign academic institutions interested in the "China market" are not the top institutions in their own countries (Altbach, 2006). Although some of these institutions are lawful, they are not approbated in their own countries and the students in these schools are difficult to transfer the credits they got in these schools to other schools and the diplomas students awarded in these schools are not recognized by other countries and institutions; furthermore, there are some foreign joint institutions that are originally registered as corporations and it is difficult to distinguish their legitimacy. Meanwhile, due to the lack of practice experience as well as effective way to estimate or judge the quality of foreign educational institutions, coupled with the financial deficit and attraction, it was not uncommon for China's institutions to cooperate with foreign educational institutions without scrutinizing their quality, which lead to the overall low-quality of the imported foreign educational resources.

Second, among Chinese-foreign joint educational programs and institutions, there are many similar low-quality subjects and specialties. For the purpose of expanding their scales and enrolling more students, some higher educational institutions didn't scrutinize strictly the quality of their foreign partners and pay little attention to the contents and performance of their cooperation courses or programs thus set up disciplines and curriculum blindly and unreasonably, which resulted in the excessive repetition of programs and the lack of characteristic of the curriculum and inevitably the waste of educational resources. Currently, the majority of the Chinese-foreign joint programs are focused on business management, followed by foreign languages, information technology, economics and education.

Due to the neglect of a clear and rational understanding of the status quo of the institutions, there are many

problems emerged regarding the curriculum design and performance of Chinese-foreign joint educational institutions. For example, because of the insufficiency of professional faculties, laboratory experiments and professional books, some professional or experimental courses of Chinese-foreign joint programs failed to carry out or were low-quality and students were unable to complete their professional exercises; owing to the lack of relatively stable training base, some teachers of some specialties in which the instruction objectives are the training of practical skills of students couldn't organize practical courses, thus the professional teaching quality of these institutions were unsatisfactory and eventually hurt the benefit of the students as well as their parents.

Third, there is no special scrutinizing or evaluation system to check and supervise Chinese-foreign cooperative activities in running schools. Though both Chinese central government and the local authorities take full legal responsibility for approving the establishment of the joint institutions or programs, their efforts are often focused on the examination of application documents, the quality assurance or evaluation mechanism implemented by the government or relative authorities after the establishment of the joint institutions or programs is insufficient. For example, to encourage and attract more foreign educational institutions to cooperate with domestic schools, governors were inclined to emphasize the supporting and preferable policies to foreign joint institutions but paid less attention to the supervision and regulation of the established joint programs or institutions; the result was that many organizations only pursue economic benefits and the expanding of their enrollment while disregard their education quality; the committees in the joint institutions were not organized in scientific way so that their liberty could not be fully utilized in making decisions; and the absence of the policies to manage and guarantee education revenue results in that some organizations performed illegally or short-sighted and misappropriated capital for overseas investment or wasted the resources of the institutions that should have been used on education.

6. The Trend of Importing Foreign Quality Higher Educational Resources into China

Firstly, the qualifications of foreign educational institutions should be authenticated and the information inquiring system about foreign degrees and educational institutions should be established as soon as possible.

In order to import quality higher educational resources, it is strictly regulated in the *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* and *Regulations for Implementing the PRC for Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* that only those formal foreign educational organizations that are legal in their countries are allowed to cooperate with China's legal educational institutions in running schools and foreign education corporations are not permitted to cooperation with China's organizations in running schools in mainland China(State Council, 2003, Chapter 1: Article 2). These regulations offered legal references for China's governments and schools to choose legitimate foreign partners. But it still requires China's governments and schools to implement the principles of examination and approval and enhance the authentication of the quality and competency of foreign educational organizations. That is, any foreign educational institutions willing to collaborate with China's institutions or governments have to be checked if it has been recognized by the relevant governments or authorities in their own countries or by international quality authentication organizations. The legitimacy, history, present situation, teaching quality and reputation of these institutions should also be scrutinized and approved by the China's governments and authorities.

At the same time, an integrated database supplying the information about educational institutions worldwide should be established and renewed in time with the latest information to help China avoid the introduction of

foreign “adulterated” schools.

Secondly, the essential principles and aims of importing foreign higher educational resources into China should be insisted on.

The first thing that China’s higher educational institutions should do in the process of importing foreign quality resources of higher education is treating the cooperation rationally and keeping in mind clearly the central task of Chinese-foreign cooperation in higher education. The institutions and relevant governments should persist in the principle that the imported resources should be requisite and worthwhile and the foreign joint institutions meet the demand of national and local economy development as well as the need of the schools’ own development and construction, including their administrative levels, the curriculum contents and the joint patterns; the imported resources should be effective for the improvement of China’s quality as well as quantity of higher educational resources; they also should be helpful for the training of the students’ ability of innovative thinking and action and for the increase of their international competitiveness. Meanwhile, it is also very important to take into concern the current foundation and conditions of China’s higher educational institutions and perform flexible and diversified modes of introduction. Above all, China must spare no effort to find the best balance point between the introduction of quality resources of higher education and the saving the cost of running schools and promote educational equity.

Thirdly, a supervision mechanism and a quality assurance mechanism of the Chinese-foreign joint programs should be established and improved.

It affirmed in the Regulations that “A Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run school shall publicize regularly relevant information on the type and level of its education, its specialties and courses and its enrollment plan” (State Council, 2003, Chapter 4: Article 33), “Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run schools offering education for academic qualifications shall grant academic qualifications certificates or other education certificates in accordance with the relevant provisions of the State” (State Council, 2003, Chapter 4: Article 34). Regarding the specialties and curricula of Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions, except for inspecting such institutions and punishing or eliminate those illegal ones according to the relevant laws and regulations, the supervision and management of Sino-foreign cooperative institutions should also be carried out through quality evaluation. Since there are lacks of effective and scientific quality evaluation system in China, it may consult the successful evaluation measures of other countries and combine self-evaluation and external evaluation of the institutions together. The evaluation target comprises teaching facilities, faculty qualifications, specialties and the quality of curriculum and instruction, the evaluation result should be published to the public and those illegal or unqualified educational institutions must be eliminated.

Since the original intention for China to develop Sino-foreign cooperative programs is to import and assimilate foreign quality resources of higher education and promote the reform and improvement of higher education in China and the education system of every country all has its own characteristic that originated from their own custom and tradition and are not always suitable for China’s education, the imported curriculum, teaching material, teaching methods and administration system of other countries should be modified and localized to adapt to China’s condition and it’s need of educational development and requirement of the training of talents.

Furthermore, the financial and taxation system in China requires renovation and the proper profit of foreign cooperators should be permitted and protected.

It is true that Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools is an undertaking beneficial to public interest, but it

also brings about private profits. Actually, for most of foreign joint institutions, their main purpose to provide educational services in China is to make profit; in practice, many Chinese institutions also starve for profit from these activities to solve their financial shortfall. Undeniably, the center government of China once took some negative or evasive attitudes to the issue, for example, it is strictly regulated in China's documents that "Chinese-foreign cooperation in education shall not seek profits as the objective and /or damage the state and public interests" (SEC, 1995, Chapter 1: Article 5). Though the documents were instituted to guarantee China's public interest, they were contrary to the motivation of foreign institutions and is not conform to the regulations of trade and service of WTO in deed. In the document of 2003, there was not any article affirm definitely the prohibition of profit-making activities, but it still lacked articles to guide the distribution and management of the revenues and private profit of Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions. Therefore, the financial and taxation systems in China should be further renovated and feasible distribution system and methods should be implemented so that the revenue and resources of the institutions can be allocated properly and "recycled" for use in the further development of education as much as possible and foreign collaborators also can gain their deserved profit. The key to solve the issue is to keep the balance between public welfare and private profit and find an appropriate ratio between them in Sino-foreign cooperative institutions.

Last but not least, China's higher education needs to be internationalized.

It has been stressed by many scholars and specialists of the necessity for China to create international educational system that can absorb the essence of foreign system while maintaining China's characteristic subjects and ways of cultivating talents that already existed and attract more overseas students to come to China to study and live. Although the introduction and acceptance of foreign educational programs into China is the main mode of China's transnational higher education currently, China's next working emphasis should be placed on promoting the quality of China's higher education and building up international subjects and curriculums that having China's own unique characteristics as well as the characteristic of internationalization to improve the international competitive capability of Chinese higher educational institutions and expand the overseas markets of China's higher education services. Only in this way can we activate China's higher education resources effectively and promote the development of China's higher education; only in this way can China's sovereignty on education be ensured fundamentally and the unification of internationalization and nationalization be actualized.

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(Edited by ZHANG Dong-ling and ZHOU Qun-ying)