

# Challenges and opportunities facing Australian universities caused by the internationalisation of Chinese higher education<sup>1</sup>

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*China opened its market to the world after it entered The World Trade Organisation (WTO) at the turn of the last century. 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. The purpose of this paper is to analyse current features and trends in international cooperation in Chinese higher education. This paper also develops a benefit-driven model of the internationalisation of Chinese higher education, and attempts to address the reasons for the marketability of cooperative programs in China. Finally, this paper discusses the issues related to the internationalisation of Chinese higher education, and makes recommendations for Australian universities intending to enter the Chinese higher educational market successfully.*

Cooperative Programs, higher education, internationalisation, challenges, opportunities

## INTRODUCTION

Strong competition at the global level for creative talents is forcing the Chinese education sector to adopt innovative ideas and new operational models in order to stay competitive after entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Chinese higher educational institutions are expected to play an important role in this process. How to improve the internationalisation quality of Chinese 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.

With an open market policy, a huge population base and increased economic advancement, there is an immense market and opportunity for higher educational development in China (Chen, 2002a). Some obvious features and phenomena have changed in Chinese higher education since the country entered the WTO. Although China is currently the major exporting country of overseas students in the world, it is also becoming an important host country for international

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students. On the one hand, more and more Chinese students study overseas; on the other hand, an increasing number of overseas students are pursuing degrees in China. In the meantime, some Chinese universities have started to restructure their curricula and are actively seeking collaboration with overseas institutions (Xinhuanet, 2001). Therefore, the internationalisation of Chinese 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 other international educational enterprises.

### THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION

By the end of June 2004, China had 1683 higher educational institutions (EDU, 2004a) including 645 universities at the following four levels. Table 1 lists the 15 national universities that are directly under the authority of the Ministry of Education.

- (1) At the first level, there are 15 national universities (Wu, 2005) that have been developed and managed by the Ministry of Education;
- (2) At the second level, there are higher educational institutions that are co-managed by the provincial governments and the Ministry of Education;
- (3) At the third level, there are higher educational institutions that are managed by the provincial governments;
- (4) At the fourth level, there are higher educational institutions that are managed by the local or municipal governments.

**Table 1. A list of the top Chinese national universities**

Universities	City	Web Address
1 Tsinghua University	Beijing	<a href="http://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/">http://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/</a>
2 Peking University	Beijing	<a href="http://www.pku.edu.cn/">http://www.pku.edu.cn/</a>
3 Peking Union Medical College	Beijing	<a href="http://www.cams.ac.cn/pumc">http://www.cams.ac.cn/pumc</a>
4 China Agricultural University	Beijing	<a href="http://www.cau.edu.cn/">http://www.cau.edu.cn/</a>
5 Beijing Normal University	Beijing	<a href="http://www.bnu.edu.cn/">http://www.bnu.edu.cn/</a>
6 Xi'an Jiaotong University	Xi'an	<a href="http://www.xjtu.edu.cn/">http://www.xjtu.edu.cn/</a>
7 Renmin University of China	Beijing	<a href="http://www.ruc.edu.cn/">http://www.ruc.edu.cn/</a>
8 Nanjing University	Nanjing	<a href="http://www.nju.edu.cn/">http://www.nju.edu.cn/</a>
9 Shanghai Jiao Tong University	Shanghai	<a href="http://www.sjtu.edu.cn/">http://www.sjtu.edu.cn/</a>
10 Zhejiang University	Hangzhou	<a href="http://www.zju.edu.cn/">http://www.zju.edu.cn/</a>
11 Fudan University	Shanghai	<a href="http://www.fudan.edu.cn/">http://www.fudan.edu.cn/</a>
12 University of Science and Technology of China	Hefei	<a href="http://www.ustc.edu.cn/">http://www.ustc.edu.cn/</a>
13 Huazhou University of Science and Technology	Wuhan	<a href="http://www.hust.edu.cn/">http://www.hust.edu.cn/</a>
14 Harbin Institute of Technology	Harbin	<a href="http://www.hit.edu.cn/">http://www.hit.edu.cn/</a>
15 Tianjin University	Tianjin	<a href="http://www.tju.edu.cn/">http://www.tju.edu.cn/</a>

(Source: Wu, 2005)

With the internationalisation of Chinese higher education, the following features have emerged in Chinese education sector.

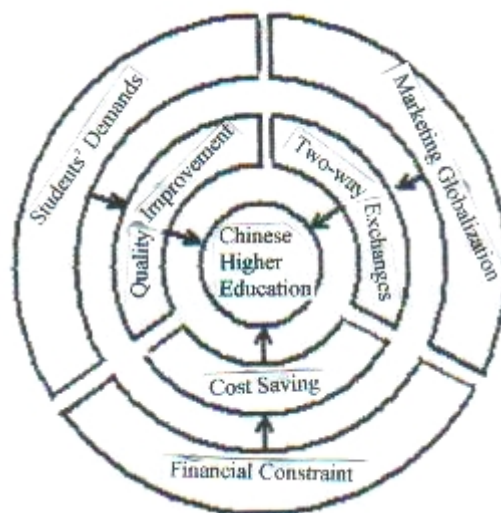
### The Two Features of Chinese Higher Education

Two features are very obvious in Chinese higher education today. First, the higher education system is undergoing a transition from elite to mass education. By the end of 2004, the number of enrolled students in Chinese higher institutions was close to 20 million, and the enrolment rate was 19 per cent (Lv, 2005). The number of students is expected to increase to 25 million and the enrolment rate to more than 23 per cent by 2010 (EDU, 2002). Second, Chinese higher education is undergoing a transition from a one-way outflow to a two-way student exchange. The number of

Chinese students studying overseas reached 527,400 in 2004 (EDU, 2004b) in more than 103 countries worldwide (Qianlong, 2002). As well, Lv (2004a) reported that the number of overseas students studying in China was increasing at the rate of 30 per cent annually. The first 33 overseas students came to study in China in 1950 (Lv, 2004a). However, by 2003 the number increased to more than 78,000. The students came from 175 countries and studied in 353 Chinese higher education institutions (Lv, 2004a). This number represented an increase of more than 2364 times compared with the numbers in 1950. In 2005, more than 500 Chinese higher educational institutions planned to recruit the overseas students (Lv, 2004b). In addition, many international cooperative programs were extant in China.

### The Benefits-Driving Model of the Internationalisation of Chinese Higher Education

Figure 1 illustrates the factors influencing change in the Chinese higher education. There are three factors driving China to open her educational market. This opening has also brought about three prominent benefits for China.



**Figure 1. The benefits-driven model of the internationalisation of Chinese higher education**

The first cause of growth comes from students' demands. Students want to obtain advanced educational training to improve their competitive capacity and increase career opportunities. Therefore, more and more Chinese students want to study in educationally advanced countries. This pressure from students, in turn, pushes the Chinese universities to improve their educational quality and catch up with the recent advances in higher education. In fact, Chinese higher educational institutions have benefited from this move by optimising the program structures and promoting new teaching methods (Liang, 2004).

The second driving force has been the globalisation of the education market. One report indicated that the tuition fees of Chinese students studying overseas were worth several billion US dollars in 2002 (Qianlong, 2002). Cooperative programs provided opportunities for students to receive overseas higher education in China, and reduce the cost of moving overseas for their education. On the other hand, the opening educational market may also attract overseas students to study in China. It changes the transition from just a one-way outflow to a two-way exchange.

The third determining factor is cost. Expensive tuition fees prevent many Chinese students from studying overseas. 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. Therefore, the cooperative programs may overcome the cost barrier. A Chinese

report (Liang, 2004) highlighted the fact that cooperative programs can reduce the tuition fees by up to 75 per cent.

The above three mentioned driving forces are likely to remain for a long period of time. Therefore, it is foreseeable that more and more overseas universities are likely to enter the Chinese higher education market.

### **Cooperative Programs in China**

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). By the end of June 2004, the Chinese government had approved 169 international cooperative programs involving 16 countries and organisations including Hong Kong (HK) (JSJ, 2004). These approved programs included two doctoral, 117 master, 48 bachelor and 2 diploma programs. Table 2 shows the approved cooperative educational programs that existed in 2004 between Chinese and overseas universities in descending order. The top six countries offering these programs: were Australia, the United States, Hong Kong, Canada, France and the United Kingdom. As the top offshore program provider in China, Australian universities have had to face increased competition from other countries.

**Table 2. The international programs in China by the end of June 2004**

<b>PROGRAM</b>	<b>Aus</b>	<b>USA</b>	<b>HK</b>	<b>Can</b>	<b>Fra</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>Ire</b>	<b>IMO</b>	<b>Kor</b>	<b>Neth</b>	<b>Nor</b>	<b>Sin</b>	<b>Bel</b>	<b>EFMD</b>	<b>Ger</b>	<b>NZ</b>	<b>SUM</b>
Diploma					2												2
Bachelor	14	16	2	5	4	4	2									1	48
Master	36	27	21	8	6	5	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1		117
Doctoral		1	1														2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>169</b>

Note: Aus = Australia, Bel = Belgium, Can = Canada, EFMD = European Foundation for Management Development, Fr = France, Ger = Germany, HK = Hong Kong, China, Ire = Ireland, IOM = the International Maritime Organisation, Kor = Korea, Neth = Netherlands, Nor = Norway, Sin = Singapore, NZ = New Zealand and UK = United Kingdom, USA = United States of America.

### **THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION FOR AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES**

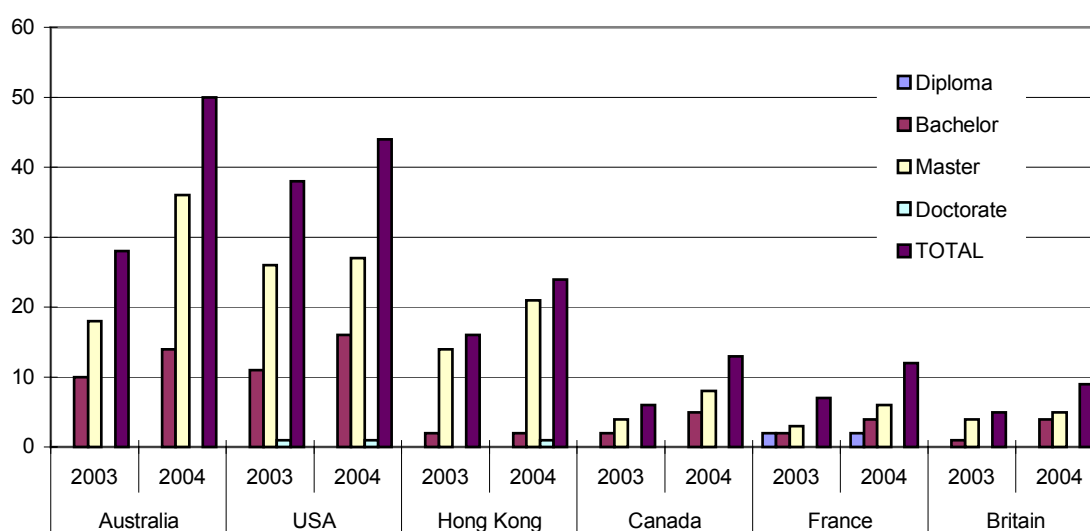
By June 2004, there were more than 36,000 Chinese students studying in Australia, which accounted for 19 per cent of all overseas students in Australia (Chinatalents, 2003). At the same time, more than 50 Australian higher educational programs were running in China as indicated in Table 2. Australian universities have taken over from their counterparts in the United States and have become the first-choice of many Chinese universities in establishing cooperative programs.

#### **Australia is the Leading Cooperative Program Provider in China**

In June 2003, the United States provided the highest number of programs (38) including 1 doctoral, 26 masters and 11 bachelor programs in China, followed by Australia with 28 programs. However, programs offered by Australian universities increased to 50 while the United States programs only increased to 44 by the end of June 2004. Therefore, Australia became the leading educational program provider in China. This increment occurred in one year from July 2003 to the end of June 2004. Table 3 and Figure 2 show a comparison of the top six countries and areas that ran cooperative programs in China between June 2003 and the end of June 2004.

**Table 3. The comparison of the top six countries and study areas between June 2003 and June 2004**

PROGRAM	Australia		United States		Hong Kong		Canada		France		Britain	
	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004
Diploma									2	2		
Bachelor	10	14	11	16	2	2	2	5	2	4	1	4
Master	18	36	26	27	14	21	4	8	3	6	4	5
Doctorate			1	1		1						
TOTAL	28	50	38	44	16	24	6	13	7	12	5	9

**Figure 2. The comparison of the top six countries and area between 2003 and 2004**

### The Competition between Australian Universities

As the major cooperative program provider to China, 21 Australian universities provided 50 programs by the end of June 2004, which were approved by the Chinese government. These included 36 masters and 14 bachelor programs that are shown in Table 4. In fact, there are some other programs in existence that had not approved as of June 2004.

Table 4 shows the following features in the Australian programs

- (1) There are 53.9 per cent (21 out of 39) Australian universities offering programs in China.
- (2) The majority are Master's programs with 72 per cent (36 out of 50).
- (3) The largest number of the cooperative programs focus on the fields of management, economics, and accounting and education.
- (4) In addition, one Masters and three bachelor programs focus on computing.
- (5) Three bachelor programs focus on electronic commerce (e-commerce).
- (6) Two Master's programs focus on general engineering.
- (7) One Master's program is in nursing.
- (8) One program provides for a degree in law.

Obviously, Australian universities are not just competing against other countries for the Chinese higher education market, they are also competing with each other.

**Table 4: Australian programs in China by the end of June 2004**

	UNIVERSITIES	PROGRAMS		SUM		
		Master	No.		Bachelor	No.
1	Charles Sturt University			B.E-commerce	1	1
				B.International Business	1	1
				B.Accounting	1	1
				B.Human Resource	1	1
2	Deakin University	M.Accounting	2			2
3	Edith Cowan University	M.IT	1			1
		M.Education Management	1			1
4	Griffith University	M.Health Management	1			1
		M.International Business	1			1
		M.Hospital Management	1			1
5	James Cook University			B.IT	1	1
		M.Accounting	2			2
6	La Trobe University	M.Health Management	2			2
		M.English Language	1			1
				B.BA	1	1
7	Macquarie University	M.Economics	1			1
8	RMIT University	M.Logistics	1	B.Logistics Business	1	2
				B.International Business	1	1
9	The Australian National University	M.Management	1			1
10	The Flinders University	M.Education	1			1
11	The University of New England			B.E-commerce	1	1
12	The University of New South Wales	M.Business	1			1
		M.TelComm Engineering	1			1
		M.Accounting	2			2
13	The University of Queensland	MBA	1			1
14	University of Canberra	MBA	1			1
		M.Economics Law	1			1
		M.Education Management	1			1
		M.English Teaching	2			2
15	University of South Australia	M.Civil Engineering	1			1
16	University of Southern Queensland			B.IT	1	1
				B.Accounting	1	1
17	University of Sydney	M.Education Management	1			1
		M. Language Education	1			1
		M.Education	1			1
18	University of Tasmania			B.IT	1	1
19	University of Technology, Sydney	M.Sporting Management	2	B.International Business	1	3
20	University of Western Sydney			B.E-commerce	1	1
21	Victoria University of Technology	MBA	1			1
		M.ERP	1			1
		M.Nursing	1			1
		M.Business	1			1
TOTAL			36		14	50

Note: M. stands for the Master program; B. stands for the Bachelor program.

### THE POLICY, SHORTAGES AND ISSUES

In July 2001, the Chinese Ministry of Education announced the inception of the Tenth Five-year Plan of China's National Educational Development" (JYB, 2001). According to this plan, the Chinese government hoped to develop disciplines that would be recognised internationally. This plan also encouraged Chinese universities to strengthen their cooperation with overseas universities. By the end of June 2004, the Chinese government had approved cooperative programs involving 96 Chinese higher educational institutions and overseas institutions. These programs are listed in Table 5.

**Table 5. The distribution of cooperative programs by the end of June 2004**

		UNIVERSITIES			PROGRAMS		
		Total	Including: MBA	percentage	Total	Including: MBA	percentage
1	Beijing	20	9	45.00	47	9	19.15
2	Shanghai	9	7	77.78	32	14	43.75
3	Tianjin	9	1	11.11	13	1	7.69
4	Zhejiang	7	1	14.29	12	1	8.33
5	Jiangsu	8	2	25.00	10	2	20.00
6	Guangdong	6	1	16.67	9	1	11.11
7	Jiangxi	5	1	20.00	8	1	12.50
8	Hubei	4			4		
9	Liaoning	6			7		
10	Jilin	3			3		
11	Shaanxi	2	1	50.00	3	1	33.33
12	Yunnan	2			4		
13	Guizhou	2			3		
14	Heilongjiang	5			5		
15	Chongqing	1			2		
16	Fujian	2			2		
17	Hebei	2			2		
18	Henan	1			1		
19	Shanxi	1			1		
20	Sichuan	1	1	100.00	1	1	100.00
Total		96	24	25.00	169	31	18.34

Since 2001 the benefits of the internationalisation of higher education to China became evident after China opened its educational market to the world. However, some shortages and other issues have also appeared.

First, the Chinese government failed to approve some programs. In fact, more than 800 programs were being run in China (Liang, 2004). However, the Chinese government had only approved 169 programs by end of 2004 as noted in Table 2.

Second, the scope of these programs was very narrow. There were 25 per cent (24 out of 96) Chinese higher educational institutions that cooperated with overseas institutions in MBA programs or executive master of business administration (EMBA) programs. This represented 31 MBA/EMBA programs or 18 per cent (31 out of 169) of the programs that are listed in Table 5. On 6th August 2003, O'Hagan (2003) published an article entitled "MBA loses sway" in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. She noted that the iconic degree of the 80s would not guarantee a job today. The same situation also exists in China.

Third, the distribution of cooperative programs is also too narrow. There are 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities aside from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao in Mainland China. The level of economic advancement in these areas varies significantly across China. Therefore, there is great diversity in the style and focus of the existing cooperative programs with overseas institutions. Table 5 shows two obvious features about distribution of cooperative programs as follows:

- (1) 65 per cent (20 out of 31) areas run cooperative programs whereas 35 per cent (11 out of 31) do not offer any joint programs.
- (2) Nearly half of cooperative programs or 47 per cent (79 out of 169) are located in the cities of Beijing and Shanghai, the principal centres of politics and culture in China.

Fourth, very few lecturers have come from overseas universities, and therefore, the majority of the lecturers in the cooperative programs are from Chinese universities. A report by Liang (2004) stated that the Chinese government has required that the number of overseas lecturers should not

be less than 25 per cent of all lecturers. However, it has been noted that 99 per cent of the lecturers in some programs come from Chinese universities (Liang, 2004).

Finally, only a few degree programs have adopted some overseas teaching materials. According to Chinese government policy, at least 30 per cent of the teaching materials should come from overseas sources (Liang, 2004).

At present, a series of policies concerning cooperation in education has been established; they address the following three critical factors:

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

From the 1st September 2003, all cooperative programs have to adhere to these regulations. They assist in the standardisation of international cooperative education in China.

### **THE TRENDS OF THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION**

The Chinese Ministry of Education recognises that Chinese 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 the coming years, Chinese higher education is expected to have the following development trends.

#### **English as teaching language**

The Chinese Ministry of Education required that universities offer at least five per cent of their courses in a bilingual mode by 2004 in informatics, biology, law, and finance programs (ZJU, 2001). Some universities have taught in English or are bilingual in their programs (ZJU, 2002). Others have revised only their teaching plans.

#### **Lecturers' skills**

Many universities have invited well known overseas professors with world class reputations to teach and do research in China, including supervising postgraduate students at Chinese higher educational institutions. They have also invited overseas experts to give guest lectures or make presentations in China. Some cooperative programs have run under the Teaching Partnership System (TPS), in which the overseas professors give the lectures and the Chinese professors act as the tutors (Tochange, 2004).

#### **Importing more teaching materials**

In September 2001, 20 kinds of overseas textbooks in information technology (IT) fields were introduced to Chinese higher education institutions (Lan, 2001). Currently, imported foreign teaching materials still focus on IT as well as bioscience and technology. However, the situation is changing. For example, some overseas textbooks in the e-commerce area are being adopted in a few Chinese universities.



### **Collaborative development in teaching materials**

Chinese experts and professionals are willing to collaborate with overseas experts in the development of teaching material. A few e-commerce textbooks have been published in China by Sino-American authors. This trend is expected to spread to other areas.

### **Master of Business Administration programs**

The demand for the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs in China is likely to decline. The MBA program would fulfil its objectives if it changed from a broad coverage to a more focused approach. An MBA in hospital management and an MBA in sports science are two such examples.

### **Joint ventures to establish universities**

The University of Nottingham from the United Kingdom in partnership with Zhejiang Wanli University, China as a joint venture launched the first overseas cooperative university called the University of Nottingham, Ningbo China in Autumn 2004 (UNNC, 2004). It is possible that more cooperative universities (rather than cooperative programs) are likely to be established in the future.

Australian universities should pay attention to these issues and trends when they consider the development of further offshore programs with China. Several aspects of Australian programs need to be adjusted so as to increase the competitive advantage of Australian universities in the Chinese market. The following suggestions should be considered by Australian universities in order to develop cooperative programs with Chinese universities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

First, it would be more suitable for overseas institutions to provide bachelor programs in China rather than masters programs. The competitive advantage exists because studying in bachelor programs offered by overseas institutions is likely to be more economical for Chinese students compared with pursuing the same degree overseas. To pursue a Master's degree, Chinese students may prefer to go to overseas instead of staying in China if indeed they wish to pursue a program offered by overseas educational institution.

Second, Australian universities should increase the duration of the master's program to enhance this credential. Most Chinese master's programs are three-year programs that include one and a half years of coursework plus one and a half years of research despite the move of a few of them to change three-year programs to two years from 2002 (Qi and Cao 2005). Currently Australian master's programs provided for overseas students are normally one to one and a half years coursework programs. Only a few universities provide master's programs of two year duration. This type of one-year Master's program would face the problem of meeting accreditation requirements by Chinese authorities if more overseas programs are run in China. Therefore, it is recommended that the master's degree should be designed as two and a half year program with one year preliminary coursework program conducted in China and one and a half years study undertaken in Australia. Students could be awarded double degrees; one from the Chinese university and another from the Australian institution of higher education after their approval by both Chinese and Australian authorities.

The third suggestion is to provide a greater variety of study disciplines. Australian universities currently only offer Master's or bachelor programs in the area of management, business, language, law and a few computer programs in China. These programs are focused too narrowly. It might be useful to offer programs which are in high demand in the Chinese market, such as e-commerce, health informatics, nursing and nursing management, hospital management, finance, human

resource management, biotechnology and bioengineering, agricultural technology and environmental protection. This would require an expression of interest from the Chinese particularly from the receptor university.

Fourth, some Australian universities have provided offshore programs in conjunction with Chinese universities. These cooperative programs are not listed as cooperating institutions in running of higher education programs awarding foreign degrees. Currently the Chinese Ministry of Education publishes this list in June and December each year. If it 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 likely to face problems in student recruitment and marketing. Therefore, it important for these programs to gain entry to the list as soon as possible.

Finally, currently the geographical distribution of programs is not even. Eleven provinces do not run any cooperative programs in China as noted in Table 5. Those provinces are mostly located in less advanced areas of China. The students living in these areas should have the same opportunities to pursue a world-class education at the same cost. Therefore, there is definitely potential for establishing more advanced educational programs in these areas.

### CONCLUSION

Today, Chinese educators are addressing higher education in global terms. This marks the entrance of Chinese higher educational institutions into the international competitive market. The influence of global forces on China's higher education system is likely to increase (Yang, 2001). Chinese 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 trend is observable in the Chinese higher education sector today.

With its accession to the WTO, Chinese higher education is bound to become more integrated into the international community (Yang, 2001). 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. The increasing demand will also affect Australian universities.

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