

**EXPLORING THE DIVERSE MOTIVATIONS OF  
TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHINA:  
COMPLEXITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS**

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyses the current situation of Transnational Higher Education in China by conducting a comprehensive documentary analysis. It first situates the phenomenon in global transnational mobility in higher education and then explores the diverse motivations of importing and exporting countries taking China and the UK as linked examples. The documentary analysis carried out for this research suggests that China has stated aims to promote Transnational Higher Education as a public good, whereas UK motivations for Transnational Education are ostensibly more driven by financial reasons. The article also identifies three features of the current situation in China: first showing that the distribution of the Transnational Higher Education in China is imbalanced; second, partner institutions are based in 21 economic developed countries or regions; third, the prominent cooperative arrangements are strongly focused in particular disciplines. The article argues that these features have led to unfair competition in some areas. Therefore, it appears that there are some inconsistencies and tensions between the stated aims of Chinese TNE policy and the way in which TNE is spreading and developing in practice.

**Keywords:** Transnational Higher Education; Chinese higher education policy; transnational mobility

## **GLOBALISATION, INTERNATIONALISATION & TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION**

The process of globalisation is pushing 21st century higher education toward greater international involvement (Altbach and Knight 2007) and this has turned higher education into ‘a global business engaging in marketing strategies to sell their knowledge-based products, attract foreign students, and establish international branches’ (Spring 2009, 100). Worldwide there is a growing demand for access to higher education combined with increasing need for more diversified and flexible types of course delivery (van der Wende 2003) with international cooperation in higher education becoming a key feature of development in today’s global market (Chan 2004). Universities in different countries are forging alliances to compete in the global and mass higher education market (ibid.) and therefore, as Leask (2008) has argued, Transnational Higher Education has become an agent of globalisation. In recent years, Transnational Higher Education has grown in scope and been engaged in recruitment campaigns for international students and faculty, as well as the race to create successful and competitive regional education hubs (Knight and Morshidi 2011).

Transnational Higher Education (TNE) is where the learners are located in a country which is different to the one where the awarding institution is based (Huang 2007; McBurnie and Ziguras 2007; Wilkins and Huisman 2012). Developed countries and larger European Union (EU) countries now provide most of the services as selling partners, while middle-income countries in Asia and Latin America have become the ‘buying’ partners (Altbach and Knight 2007). In the English-speaking world, international operations have become the primary mode of development for some HE

institutions (Marginson and van der Wende 2009). Transnational Higher Education is becoming a popular format within international student mobility in the 21st century, especially now that TNE practice need not always involve a change of location given new opportunities such as online learning.

The providers in exporting higher education products and services often experience barriers to trade in education, such as national legislation which may prevent foreign providers from obtaining a license to operate in the country (van der Wende 2003). Unstable regulations in the host country may turn opportunities into threats (Wilkins and Huisman 2012). Since the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations (1986 to 1993), educational services have been integrated into the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and Western countries have since tried to reduce barriers and gain better access to foreign educational markets through these negotiations (van der Wende 2003). One of the landmark achievements of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations (1986-1993) was the creation of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) which was implemented in January 1995 (WTO 2006) and defined as ‘a multilateral agreement through which WTO members commit to voluntary liberalisation of trade in services, including education’ (Ziguras 2003, 89).

GATS aims to ‘establish a multilateral framework of principles and rules for trade in services with a view to the expansion of such trade under conditions of transparency and progressive liberalisation and as a means of promoting the economic growth of all trading partners and the development of developing countries’ (WTO 1995, 285). The GATS Agreement distinguishes between four modes of supplying services which are also applied to the international trade in education, as demonstrated

in Table 1.

*Table 1 about here*

Through GATS or other bilateral free trade agreements, trade liberalisation has been realized in higher education (van der Wende 2003). As mentioned above, Transnational Higher Education has become a global phenomenon whose scale of activity has grown significantly in recent years (Naidoo 2009). The main form of cross-border higher education, in terms of numbers engaged, however, is still international student mobility (Mode 2). International mobility of programmes (Mode 3) has, however, become the second most common form and ‘may mark the beginning of an in-depth transformation of higher education in the long term’ (Vincent-Lancrin 2009, 68). The Chinese programmes focused upon later in this article in Figures 1, 2, 3 below belong to Mode 3. This mode enables the exporting countries to recruit students and deliver their education programmes in students’ home countries through setting up branch campuses, such as the University of Nottingham Ningbo China, or establishing joint ventures with local institutions, such as 3+1 or 4+0 programmes, in which students undertake some of their education in their home countries and some in the foreign providing country.

## **THE STUDY**

This research is based on a comprehensive documentary analysis on the phenomenon of Transnational Higher Education aiming to identify significant features of the current situation in China. The sources of the documents are from the official website of the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) (<http://www.moe.edu.cn>). The documentary analysis used search strings and the results generated are shown in Table 2.

***Table 2 about here***

Keywords related to Transnational Higher Education programmes or institutions officially authorised by MoE were used to find a total of 1,652 documents. The keywords of ‘Liu Xue’ (study abroad) were used to identify 2,351 documents, among which ‘Chu Guo Liu Xue’ (Chinese students study abroad) and ‘Lai Hua Liu Xue’ (foreign students study in China) were analysed respectively to research two of the trends both within the documents and drawing on the recent literature. These documents consisted of Government statistics, reports, notices, and regulations which were reviewed and analysed. The structured themes and issues drawn out of the analysis form the basis of the arguments in this article.

In addition to the themes generated from the documentary analysis above, an analysis was carried out on the data relating to 511 Transnational Higher Education programmes and institutions at undergraduate and postgraduate level identified and published on the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) Transnational Education website (<http://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn>) (see Figures 1, 2 and 3 for details). Some of the institutions and programmes were set up before the *Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* took effect in

2003, but they have been reviewed by the government. Due to the lack of data on non-degree courses, the analysis is based solely on the degree courses of TNE.

Scott's (1990) four criteria of analysis were kept in mind with attention paid to authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning in order to guarantee the quality of the documents. Data from different sources, such as the academic articles and the official documents, were cross-checked to see if there were any inconsistencies. As the documents were mainly in Chinese, the analysed results and tables were double checked by two professionals who are fluent in Chinese and English. In addition to this, the team of authors on this article is transnational, one from China and two from the UK. This is valuable as it provides the opportunity to reflect different national perspectives on the data. The result of the negotiations amongst the authors regarding the culturally specific meanings of terms is also significant.

## **CHINESE-BRITISH COOPERATION IN TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION**

Chinese Transnational Higher Education has been greatly enhanced following China's accession to the World Trade Organisation in 2001 and the enactment of the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools in 2003. The United Kingdom, together with other major English-speaking destination countries such as America, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, hosted 46% of the foreign students in the world in 2004 (Gürüz 2008, 238). These

countries have become the most prominent exporters of programme mobility, with Mainland China operating alongside Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and India as the largest markets importing higher education programmes (Naidoo 2009). Whilst this article is not a comparative study as such it was considered important to contextualise the Chinese documentary analysis against an exploration of a providing country's TNE provision. As indicated above, since the UK is a major provider of TNE this section of the article will briefly explore the UK context of TNE.

### ***The UK Story***

The UK currently operates 1,395 TNE programmes and has built 73 overseas campuses. This amounts to a total of 454,473 students enrolled and involved in TNE and this excludes Distance Learning students (British Council 2013). The UK's top partners for provision of TNE are quoted by the British Council and HESA statistics as being Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan, Mainland China and Hong Kong (ibid.). Current practices and activities in TNE in different universities and countries are quite complex and it is not easy to give a commonly agreed glossary of the types of programmes available. Table 3 presents an overview of the four main practices of Chinese-British Transnational Higher Education, including the terms that are commonly used by the British universities. Naidoo (2009, 315) explains the definitions applying to all countries, while the following table was adapted for this article to be specific to the cooperation between China the UK and a third column to indicate how qualifications are awarded has been added.

*Table 3 about here*

Although the practices and activities of collaboration among higher education institutions between China and the UK are prospering, the aims and purpose of carrying out the cooperation are very different. In the UK, over the last decade political debate has led to claims that overall levels of public funding for higher education have become increasingly inadequate and the government has repeatedly cut public funding of higher education. Higher education export has been identified as a promising economic activity and an important source of additional income (van der Wende 2003, 195). Previously the British government had aimed to increase its share in the global market for international students to 25% (van der Wende 2003), and the Prime Minister's Initiative (2006) urged British universities to increase the number of international students by 100,000 by 2011 (Brown and Holloway 2007). Universities have been encouraged to generate international ventures and extend their market in developing and middle-income countries via branch campuses, franchised degree programmes, and partnerships with local institutions (Altbach and Knight 2007). Economic benefit has thus become a key motive for transnational projects in most of the universities (Altbach and Knight 2007) and this is being reflected in the motivations and philosophies driving the development of UK TNE. Some evidence for this can be found in UK universities' internationalisation and transnational policy statements. The University of Manchester's policy statement is an example stating that:

An underlying principle of our TNE activities is that they must not risk the University's potential to maximise international student fee income (University of Manchester 2014).

In addition to emphasising the motivation of TNE as being economic, the

University of Manchester's policy also underlines the overriding importance of the quality of the international student experience 'at home' in Manchester.

It is important to note that there may be a differentiation in the way that research-oriented universities and teaching-oriented universities (or 'Russell Group' and 'new universities' in the UK) approach transnational education. In the early 1990s in the UK, the university-polytechnic divide was ended, and this promoted the development of competitive education and training markets (Bennell and Pearce 2003). The new universities which emerged are more prepared to set up overseas validated courses than the older universities who are concerned that the collaboration with overseas institutions might tarnish their long-established reputation (ibid.). This distinction between the TNE behaviour of research and teaching universities is also the case in China (Fang 2012) and this is also highlighted in the next section. It should be acknowledged that there are also perceived political and cultural benefits of TNE (Fernandes 2006) and these include universities maintaining an influential position on the world stage and reaping the benefits of special links of international alumni.

Maintaining a global network of people in power who have experience and understanding of the UK through its education system continues to be a way of facilitating continued global influence indirectly. (Fernandes 2006, 135).

These international alumni act as ambassadors for universities abroad and also benefit institutions by providing positive testimonies of career advancement (ibid.). A recent survey has shown that the alumni generally hold positive attitudes towards their study in the UK and not only would recommend others to undertake a similar experience, but also are loyal to UK brands which may benefit the UK's economy

(Mellors-Bourne et al. 2013). These alumni are potential professional networks and can 'offer the possibility of future business transactions and collaborations of economic value to the UK' (ibid., xi). Other benefits for institutions listed by Olcott (2008) include internationalising the curriculum, preparing students for a global society, collaborative research, and creating a multicultural campus. However, the above rhetoric cannot disguise the fact that economic benefit is the main motivation for British institutions to host international students (Olcott 2008). Meanwhile, in comparison with recruiting international students onto courses individually, Transnational Higher Education initiatives such as articulation programmes, can bring in more sustainable numbers of students with better preparation for study abroad. Therefore, considerable numbers of institutions in the UK have focused on these transnational programmes to enhance their revenue generation.

### ***The Chinese Story***

China, with its huge potential market, has become a favourite source country for international students. Numbers of Chinese students have continued to rise; they have become the largest group represented amongst international students in the UK (UKCISA 2013). China currently operates 1,979 TNE programmes, which amount to a total of 450,000 students enrolled in TNE and 1.5 million graduates from TNE (MoE 2013a). The Chinese government is reluctant to accept the current role of the country being a sender in Transnational Higher Education, although the recent announcement that China will open its first branch campus in Malaysia in 2015 demonstrates a gradual sea change in this respect. The Chinese Government define Transnational Higher

Education as ‘Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools’, which means:

The cooperation between foreign educational institutions and Chinese educational institutions in establishing educational institutions within the territory of China to provide education service mainly to Chinese citizens (State Council of the People’s Republic of China 2003, Article 2).

‘Running schools’ is the English translation of Chinese “Ban Xue” in the government regulation. It refers to the phenomenon that Chinese universities and foreign universities cooperate to set up programmes or institutions to recruit Chinese students. These students either stay in China to finish the whole course or go abroad in their later stage of study. The cooperation of institutions in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao with the institutions in mainland China is also considered part of Chinese TNE.

Chinese TNE cooperation can appear in two formats: setting up institutions or setting up programmes. The Chinese government sees TNE as ‘a component of China’s educational cause’ and a benefit to the public interest (State Council of the People’s Republic of China 2003, Article 3). The fundamental stated aim of TNE is to introduce high quality education resources from other countries to enhance the international competitiveness of Chinese institutions (Zhou 2006). The Chinese government strongly advocates that education should support the public interest (MoE 2006, 2013a). Some of the foreign partners may focus on the profits from the cooperation, and even reduce their standard of recruitment and degrees, which is not what the Chinese partners want (Ke 2010). The Chinese government may tend towards agreement with Skelly’s (2009) argument that higher education is not a commodity, but a service for public interest. This aim stands in contrast to the UK motivation for TNE as noted above.

In 2010, the Chinese government published the ‘National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)’, which shows that the Chinese government will encourage its schools and institutions to conduct international communication and cooperation in various ways and successfully manage some examples of Transnational Higher Education in order to explore how to make use of the excellent education resources generated by TNE (Central People’s Government of People’s Republic of China 2010). This shows that TNE has been considered as an ‘experimental field’ for an innovative mode of talent cultivation (Ke 2010). In the more recently published documents, the Chinese government encourages students to receive foreign education in China to save their own expenditure and push the internationalisation of Chinese universities (MoE 2013a). This represents a financial motivation for TNE which meshes more closely with the UK aim outlined above.

Transnational Higher Education has offered a way for Chinese students to receive foreign education without going abroad, which has saved the expenditure on education. The average annual tuition fee of TNE is around 25,000 RMB, while studying in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia will cost students around 90,000 RMB per year. 450,000 students enrolled in TNE in 2012. If half of them choose to go abroad, we can save 15 billion RMB in tuition fee that year (MoE 2013a, Part 2.2).

The motivations for the currently developing situation in Transnational Higher Education in China as represented in the documents analysed for this study can be characterised in three ways. First, the rapid development of the Chinese economy since 1978, especially through the accession to the World Trade Organisation in 2001, requires China not only to convert the capital of its huge population into abundant human resources, but also to ‘produce competent professionals at all levels, of all varieties, and ranging from the academically erudite to the practically skilled’ (Zhou

2006, 281). Therefore, universities in China have become key agents in economic and social development (Willis 2006). Collaboration with developed countries in higher education has been greatly encouraged to obtain world-leading experience and to improve Chinese research and innovation capacities. Through cooperative transnational higher education programmes Chinese universities are expected to integrate urgently needed curricula and textbooks of world class levels and ‘assimilate the strong points and successful governance expertise of foreign education institutions in light of China’s actual conditions’ (Zhou 2006, 273). Through this cooperation, Chinese universities can enhance their image, competitive position, and strengthen academic exchange to be part of a global academic community (Willis 2006). Currently, there are 577 Chinese higher education institutions hosting TNE, which accounts for 21% of the total number of Chinese higher education institutions. 79 are in the projects of 985 or 211 (the labels for prestigious research-intensive Chinese institutions), which only accounts for 16% of TNE institutions (MoE 2013a), demonstrating again that research-intensive institutions are less likely to engage in TNE. These universities are defensive of their prestigious reputations and are looking for collaboration with universities within the top 100 around the world.

Second, the high value attached to education in Chinese culture is a driving social force. Chinese families are ready to make sacrifices to provide the best possible educational opportunities for their children (Welch 2009). This desire has been heightened by the high number of single children in China, born under the ‘One-Child Family Policy’ (Zhou 2006). At the same time, the development of the economy has led to the generation of a larger middle class in the last 30 years. The middle class is expanding with an estimated number of approximately 500 million by 2025 and this

group has resources to pay tuition and other fees for admission to universities (Altbach 2009). Their demand for access to higher education is diverse with respect to the places to go and subjects to take. Owing to the long-lasting influence of the high value of a western degree and the successful examples of professionals with overseas experiences, this group of people are trying to send their children to study abroad. This could be a way for the Chinese new middle class families to secure a generational reproduction of their class status and mobility (Tsang 2013).

Acquisition of Western higher education becomes the imagined gateway to upward social and economic mobility in an increasingly unequal global system  
(Doherty and Singh 2005, 57).

Transnational Higher Education gives these parents an alternative option to sending their children abroad. In view of the fact that Chinese students begin university at seventeen years of age (a parallel with the Scottish education system) they may be perceived as being too young to go abroad immediately after high school and some parents thus prefer the transnational programmes which will give their children a period of time to lay a foundation in a Chinese university before studying abroad. Both the parents and the students have taken the programmes as a kind of springboard for future education abroad and as a perceived key foundation for a pathway to a position with a large international company (Hou, Montgomery and McDowell 2011).

Third, the conflict between the strong domestic need for tertiary education and the limited supply of the Chinese universities has strengthened the development of Transnational Higher Education in China. In the late 1990s, China started to change its higher education from elite education to mass education. The gross enrolment rate for

higher education has increased from 10.5% in 1999 to 23.3% in 2008 (MoE 2009), and the Chinese government is going to raise the rate to 40% in 2020 (Central People's Government of People's Republic of China 2010). China runs the largest higher education system in the world with 2,263 higher education institutions and 20,210,000 university students in 2008 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2009). However, places at a desirable university are still very competitive. Students need to get a good result in the selective National Higher Education Entrance Examination in order to get into their preferred university. As a result of this and many other developing trends, an increasing number of potential students choose to study abroad through participation in the Transnational Higher Education programmes and institutions. The following section provides an analysis of the developing features of Chinese TNE.

### **Features of Transnational Higher Education in China**

The Chinese government encourages Chinese institutions to cooperate with foreign educational institutions which are well-recognised in terms of their academic level and education quality, and urges them to set up cooperation in emerging and urgently needed academic subjects required for the Chinese market (MoE 2004, 2013a). Cooperatively-run institutions or programmes can be made up of various types at various levels, but exclude the compulsory education service or special education services such as the military, police and political education services (State Council of the People's Republic of China 2003, Article 6). Furthermore, 'foreign religious organizations, religious institutions, religious colleges and universities or religious

workers' are not allowed to engage in the cooperative activities in China (State Council of the People's Republic of China 2003, Article 7). Higher education and vocational education are two fields that have been encouraged to develop cooperation. By the end of 2003, 270 Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions and programmes (including cooperation with Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan) in higher education had been established (Zhou 2006, 270). By the 19th July, 2010, the number had increased to 511 according to the institution lists published by MoE (2010a, 2010b).

The following section is based on the analysis of the 511 programmes and institutions at undergraduate and postgraduate level published on the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) Transnational Education website (<http://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn>). The locations of the Chinese partner universities, the countries and regions of the foreign partner universities, and the cooperative courses are the main themes analysed in this part. Some of the features in the current practices of Transnational Higher Education are shown in the following examples.

The first feature relates to the imbalance in the distribution of the Transnational Higher Education programmes and institutions shown in Figure 1. According to the statistics published in 2003, these institutions and programmes are mainly situated in the economically and culturally well-developed eastern coastal regions or large and medium-sized cities (MoE 2003). In 2010, the general distribution has not changed greatly; however, there are two exceptions. Heilongjiang, which is not an economically well-developed province, has 152 undergraduate programmes and 4 postgraduate programmes, although 74 of them are in cooperation with institutions in Russia. This is partly because of its location next to Russia, and partly due to its language foundation,

as Russian is the second language in some of the middle schools. Henan, which is in the middle of China, is the other exception. It has 35 undergraduate programmes and 2 institutions. This has benefited from the proactive policies encouraging its universities to cooperate with the world's top 500 universities.

*Figure 1 about here*

Shanghai has the second largest number of TNE provisions with a diversity of partners. It has 5 TNE institutions cooperating with universities in the USA, the UK, Germany, France and Belgium. Among its 52 undergraduate programmes, the partner universities are from 13 countries or regions: the USA (15), the UK (7), Germany (7), France (5), Australia (4), Canada (3), Netherland (2), Italy (2), Japan (2), New Zealand (1), South Korea (1) and Hong Kong (1). The capital city, Beijing, has the largest number in postgraduate programmes. The USA (12), Australia (12) and Hong Kong (7) are the three most favoured cooperative countries or regions. However, among the five autonomous regions, only Neimeng (Inner Mongolia) has 4 undergraduate programmes with institutions in Australia and Canada. The other four regions, Tibet, Xinjiang, Guangxi and Ningxia do not have any TNE degree courses. Although the government has encouraged more cooperation in the western and more remote areas of China since 2004, the situation has not changed. The lower level of economic development has made these areas less attractive to foreign universities. There is a tension here between China saying that TNE is for the public good whilst at the same time not developing education where it is most needed, in the poorest areas of the country.

The second feature is that partner institutions are based in 21 economic developed countries or regions. As shown in Figure 2, the UK ranks the first with 114 programmes and institutions. The USA and Australia are both runners-up with 84 each. The other top 10 countries or regions are Russia (75), Canada (39), Hong Kong (30), Germany (24), France (18), South Korea (8) and Netherland (7). Ireland, New Zealand and Japan are the next in the league with 5 from each country. Other countries or regions, such as Belgium (3), Italy (2), Sweden (2), Singapore (2), Austria (1), Norway (1), South Africa (1) and Taiwan (1) have begun to expand their market in mainland China. As previously mentioned here, the UK is a leading provider of transnational education (McBurnie and Ziguras 2009). However, its cooperative level needs to be extended in China. Most of the UK's cooperative programmes are at undergraduate levels. The UK has only 10 postgraduate programmes, while the USA has 33, the highest among the 21 countries and regions.

***Figure 2 about here***

Hong Kong comes third with 23 postgraduate programmes. This evidence supports NG's (2011) argument that Hong Kong is ambitious to become the regional education hub through the internationalisation of its higher education campuses. Most of these countries and regions are English-speaking, due to the increasingly hegemonic role of English as a global language (Bennell and Pearce 2003). In addition, in some of the non-English-speaking nations, English is spreading as a medium of instruction to attract foreign students (Marginson and van der Wende 2009). As shown in Figure 2, other developed European countries, such as Russia, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Sweden and Austria are actively seeking partner institutions in China.

As mentioned before, Russia has located its priority market in the north-east of China, especially Heilongjiang Province. Apart from one undergraduate programme with Henan University, all of the other 74 programmes are in Heilongjiang. Germany has set up 6 TNE institutions in Shanghai (1), Beijing (1), Shandong (2) and Shanxi (2). China-EU School of Law (CESL) in the China University of Political Science and Law, is built on cooperation with the University of Hamburg in Germany to ‘offer high-level legal education to law students and legal professionals, to conduct Sino-European legal research and consultancy activities and to substantially contribute to the advancement of the rule of law in China’ (China-EU School of Law 2010).

The third feature of Chinese TNE that the analysis pinpointed is that the most prominent cooperative subjects are Economics, Business Administration, Electrical Engineering and Computing Science, and Foreign Language Studies (see Figure 3). Based on ‘the Higher Education Institution Undergraduate Subject Catalogue’ published by the MoE (MoE 1998), the 349 undergraduate programmes can be grouped into 33 categories and 87 subjects, among which, Computing Science and Technology ranks the first with 40 programmes. Seven countries have cooperation in this subject. The UK has set up 12 computing programmes, eight of which are in the Helongjiang province. Meanwhile, all of the eight Russian computing programmes are in the same province. The duplication of similar projects focusing on similar disciplines has caused severe competition within the same area.

*Figure 3 about here*

Some UK universities set up duplicated courses in different Chinese universities. When the Chinese students move on to their second part of study in the UK, they are most likely to be put in the same class. Thus, it is very common to see many UK classes with a high ratio of Chinese students compared to home students. This not only destroys the Chinese students' expectation of making foreign friends, but has also had negative impacts on the home students' learning experience (Hou and McDowell 2013).

## **DISCUSSION**

This study enables a consideration of the stated policies of the Chinese government with respect to TNE policies against the actual practices of TNE. This reveals some inconsistencies between the stated aims and motivations of the policies and the way that TNE is developing and spreading in practice.

One prominent contradiction is that there is a tension between stated Chinese Government Policy underlining that TNE is for the public good but in reality TNE is not developing education where it is most needed, which is in the most socially and economically deprived areas of the country. Despite the Chinese government's effort in shifting the balance of public resources to support education in western provinces (MoE 2013b), the proposed development of TNE activity in these areas is not prospering. The Chinese government wants TNE to support the wider public good in China, but provinces of China that are remote or not well developed economically are not generally benefitting from the TNE currently available. TNE programmes and institutions charge

high tuition fees, which is part of the reason that foreign partners are more willing to cooperate with universities situated in wealthy areas with high level of household consumption expenditure. For example, a TNE programme in southeast China charged RMB 19,200 for the annual tuition fee, which was about four times that of the non-programme students (Hou, Montgomery and McDowell 2011). This may not be affordable for students from deprived families.

The second evident inconsistency is that the aim of the Government is to import the most urgently needed subjects to improve its education standards, but the duplication of similar projects focusing on similar disciplines has caused severe competition within the subjects favoured by providers and is thus an unnecessary waste of resources. This can be said to be undermining the public interest and therefore works against the development of TNE for the public good. Chinese high-school leavers are recruited into TNE programmes or institutions through their results in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination. The enrolment standard for degree courses has three tiers and students need to get a high enough score to pass at the relevant standard. The intended recruitment number and score are required to be reported to the Ministry of Education before the Examination and cannot be changed casually. This leads to some inflexibility in the system and the consequence may be that some of the foreign degrees from a broader range of disciplines cannot be authenticated by the Chinese government.

Quality assurance has thus become a prominent issue because of the concerns about student enrolment standards and performance and as a result of this the Chinese Government has made the decision to slow the pace of development with respect to

licenses for TNE. A department to check the quality of Transnational Higher Education in China and to make sure that high standard programmes educating qualified students are in place has been created. To ensure the quality of the TNE, the Chinese Ministry of Education asks institutions to adhere to the principle of public interest in TNE and work against unreasonably high tuition fees (MoE 2006). The Chinese government is taking a stand against the commoditisation of education and restates that education services are not a commodity to trade. To prevent the reduction of enrolment standards, the government emphasises that the number of enrolments must be officially approved and listed in the national recruitment plan. If there are not enough potential students in the approved tier of the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, institutions are not allowed to recruit students for the programme in a lower tier. The teaching quality, standard of the curriculum and degrees awarded should be demonstrated as equivalent to those at the partner universities. For 'double campus' programmes, foreign university staff should deliver at least one third of the core modules and teaching hours. However, this is very hard to implement for some of the programmes and has not yet been fully attained.

Therefore, in 2007, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued another notice to regulate the TNE (MoE 2007). This points out that some universities prefer to set up low cost programmes such as Commerce and Administration, Management, Computing and Information Technology. To be approved by the government, Chinese universities are encouraged to cooperate only with well-known universities or subjects. Eminent scholars in these institutions will also be considered as a criterion for approval. A specialised platform has been created to monitor TNE (<http://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn>). Students and parents are able to check the legality and status of a programme or

institution to help them make their decision about TNE programmes. The analysis of the current features of TNE in China presented here may guide the decisions of policy makers who intended to cooperate with Chinese institutes. The discussion here will enable institutions to understand the policy emphasis of the Chinese Government and this may help in different choices of TNE destinations thus avoiding over emphasis in geographical areas and in specific subject disciplines.

The Chinese Government is reluctant to see TNE simply becoming a recruitment tool for overseas institutions, and emphasises that the essence of the cooperation should be for the Chinese institutions to introduce and absorb high-quality educational resources through which their own education system can be improved (MoE 2007, 2013a). It should not be simply about sending Chinese citizens abroad. However, the quality audit system was set up in 2012 when the Chinese Ministry of Education conducted an experimental audit on TNE programmes and institutions in three provinces (Liaoning, Jiangsu and Henan) and one municipality directly under the Central Government (Tianjin). Those who failed in the audit were ordered to terminate the cooperation. Lacking statistical figures from the Government, the general results of the audit are not clear. But it is certain that in the audit, not only student satisfaction was given importance, but the actual introduction of high quality of education resources was considered as one of the crucial standards to be met (MoE 2013a). The Chinese Government intended to order Chinese universities to import one third of core modules for each TNE programme, invite foreign staff to deliver one third of the core modules and bear one third of the teaching hours (MoE 2006). **As a result of the consequent strain on resources**, another round of audit is being carried on 314 TNE programmes and institutions in 23 provinces and municipalities since the early of 2013 (MoE 2013a).

Students and their parents can check their registration information on the official website ([www.crs.jsj.edu.cn](http://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn)) to increase the public participation in the audit. Therefore, only partner institutions who pay attention to the quality can be awarded the licence from the Chinese government.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

TNE is widely acknowledged as a growth area in higher education. However there is limited research investigating why and how TNE is growing and the likely trends in its development. This article sets transnational higher education in the context of broader political and economic conditions. Research on TNE has most frequently been undertaken at the institutional level, considering the practice and impact within universities and colleges, and at the individual, student experience level. However, an understanding of political and socio-economic conditions helps to explain the growth of TNE and the directions of development.

The current state of development cannot be explained by the stereotypical view of English-speaking and Western countries regarding the various forms of international higher education as purely for income generation. The old geo-political configuration of TNE and the view of some developed and, especially, English-speaking countries acting as suppliers of education and others receiving or purchasing their product is now more complex. It is likely that these distinctions in TNE will become less clear cut, with perhaps many countries acting as both suppliers and receivers. New models of TNE

such as online and e-learning are also offering new opportunities with different ways to study and have an international experience.

The developments in China remind us that TNE is not merely an economic operation. There are strong social and political drivers for TNE operating in China which concern the up-skilling of the workforce and the social and economic development of regions across the country. Yao et al. (2010) raise questions about the impact of HE expansion on social justice in China, suggesting that HE reforms have disadvantaged people in impoverished regions. Although cost-effective forms of TNE, some delivered using new models, are important, the academic and social outcomes of higher education are of key concern. In order to achieve the basic goal to provide opportunities to study 'abroad' importing countries have accepted the tendency for providers to trade upon reputation and the excellence of their standards has been largely assumed. We now see a strong interest in quality assurance with respect to TNE. This is a development of key interest of both importing and exporting countries. Now, with so much more diversity, quality assurance systems offer a more evidence-based approaches to the claims for quality provision and are becoming increasingly important.

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## TABLES & FIGURES

Table 1. Four Modes of Supply in GATS (Source: Hou 2011 adapted from Altbach and Knight 2007; van der Wende 2003; WTO 2006)

Mode	Definition	International Trade in Education Examples
Mode 1 Cross-border Trade	Supply from the territory of one Member (of WTO) in the territory of any other Member	Distance education(e-learning), Franchise courses
Mode 2 Consumption Abroad	Supply in the territory of one Member to the service consumer of any other Member	Student studying abroad
Mode 3 Commercial Presence	Supply by a service supplier of one Member, by means of commercial presence in the territory of any other Member	Branch campuses, Joint ventures with local institutions
Mode 4 Presence of Natural Persons	Supply by a service supplier of one Member, through the presence of natural persons of a Member in the territory of any receiving Member	Professors and researchers providing educational services in other countries (known as ‘flying faculty’)

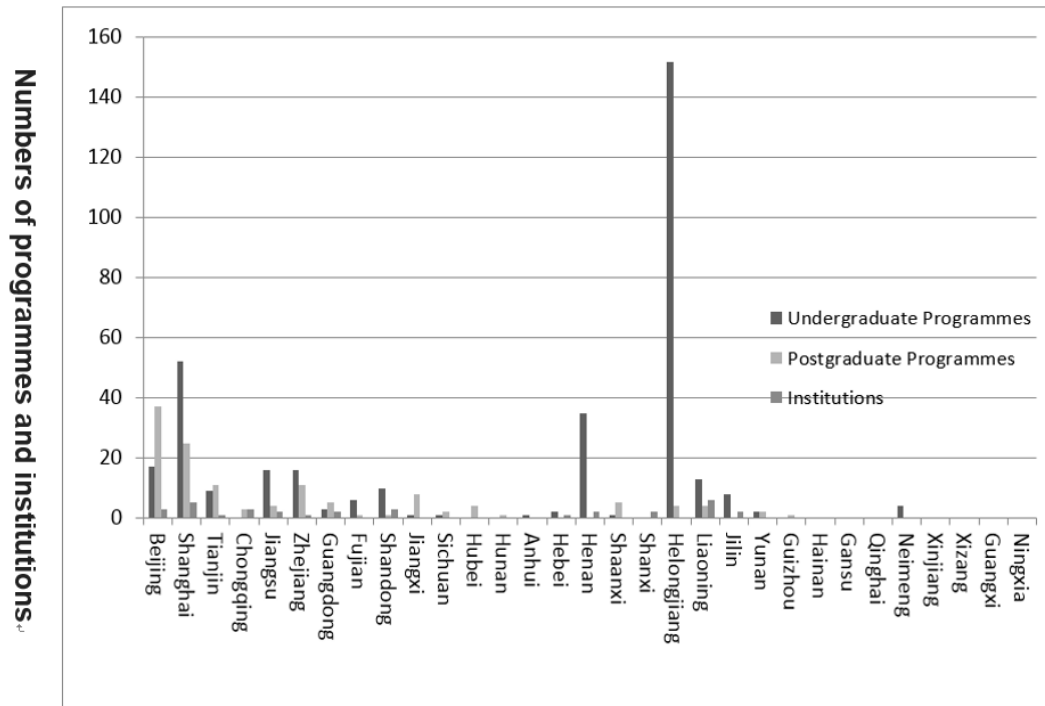
Table 2. Search History from the Official Website of MoE (<http://www.moe.edu.cn>)

Search Strings		Results
Keywords in Chinese	English Translation	
中外合作办学 Zhong Wai He Zuo Ban Xue	Chinese foreign cooperation in running schools (TNE officially authorised by the Chinese Government)	1633
对外合作办学 Dui Wai He Zuo Ban Xue	foreign cooperation in running schools (Another term meaning TNE officially authorized by the Chinese Government)	19
留学 Liu Xue	Study abroad	2351
出国留学 Chu Guo Liu Xue	Chinese students study abroad	838
来华留学 Lai Hua Liu Xue	Foreign students study in China	373

Table 3. Current Practices and Activities in Transnational Higher Education between China and the UK (Hou 2011, adapted from Naidoo 2009, 315)

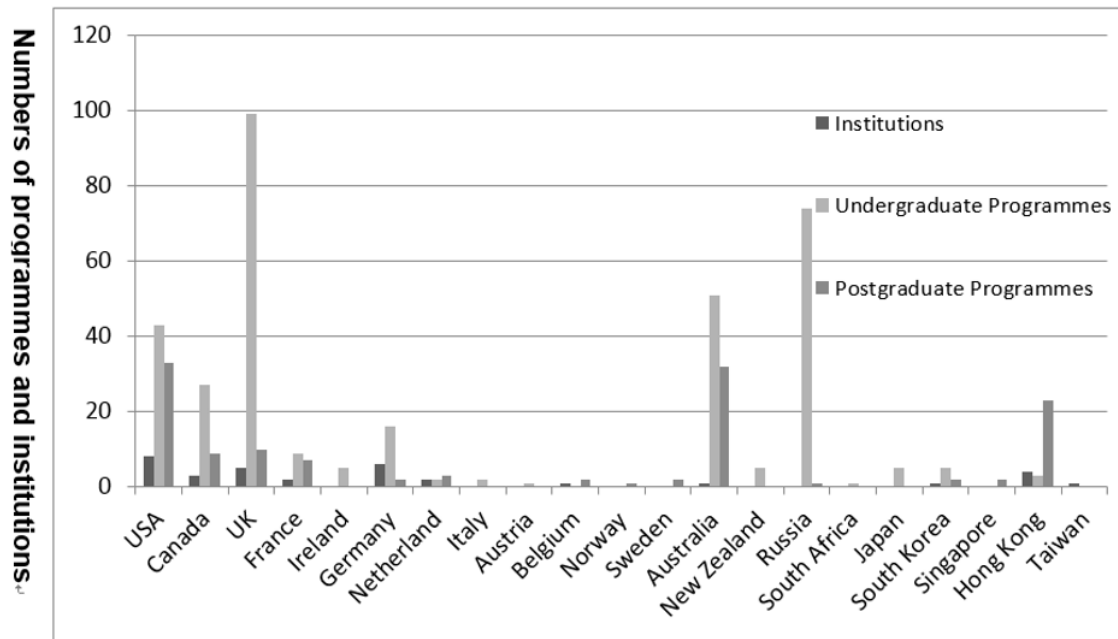
<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Modalities</b>	<b>Qualifications</b>
Franchising	An institution in the UK (the franchiser) grants a Chinese university the right to deliver the franchiser's educational programmes in China or other countries. Students undertake the entire programme in China or a third country	Awarded by the franchiser in the UK
Twinning Degrees	An arrangement where an institution in the UK collaborates with another institution in China allowing students studying at the latter institution to transfer their course credits to the institution in the UK.	Awarded by the institution in the UK
Programme Articulations	Students undertake part of a British qualification in China and then transfer to the British institution with 'advanced standing' in terms of study credits and credit transfer to complete the qualification at the British institution in the UK	Awarded by the institution in the UK or joint/double degrees from both institutions.
Branch Campus	A subsidiary/satellite campus is established by a British education institution in China to deliver its own education programmes, via joint venture partnerships with local Chinese partners	Awarded by the institution in the UK. (graduation certificates are normally awarded by the joint venture)

Figure 1. TNE Undergraduate and Postgraduate Degree Programmes and Institutions by 19th July, 2010



	Beijing	Shanghai	Tianjin	Chongqing	Jiangsu	Zhejiang	Guangdong	Fujian	Shandong	Jiangxi	Sichuan	Hubei	Hunan	Anhui	Hebei	Henan	Shaanxi	Shanxi	Heilongjiang	Liaoning	Jilin	Yunnan	Guizhou	Hainan	Gansu	Qinghai	Neimeng	Xinjiang	Xizang	Guangxi	Ningxia
Undergraduate Programmes	17	52	9	0	16	16	3	6	10	1	1	0	0	1	2	35	1	0	152	13	8	2	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0
Postgraduate Programmes	37	25	11	3	4	11	5	1	1	8	2	4	1	0	0	0	5	0	4	4	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Institutions	3	5	1	3	2	1	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 2. Partner Countries and Regions in TNE by 19th July, 2010



	USA	Canada	UK	France	Ireland	Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Austria	Belgium	Norway	Sweden	Australia	New Zealand	Russia	South Africa	Japan	South Korea	Singapore	Hong Kong	Taiwan
<b>Undergraduate Programmes</b>	43	27	99	9	5	16	2	2	1	0	0	0	51	5	74	1	5	5	0	3	0
<b>Postgraduate Programmes</b>	33	9	10	7	0	2	3	0	0	2	1	2	32	0	1	0	0	2	2	23	0
<b>Institutions</b>	8	3	5	2	0	6	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	1

Figure 3. Subjects of TNE Undergraduate Programmes by 19th July, 2010

