



RESEARCH ON FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SINO-FOREIGN COOPERATIVE UNIVERSITIES IN CHINA

Mang Lu^{1,2i},

Man Jiang²

¹Dhurakij Pundit University,
Bangkok, Thailand

²NingBo City College of Vocational Technology,
NingBo, China

Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors influencing the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities in Zhejiang Province, China. The research data was collected from semi-structured interviews with 10 staff members currently employed at Sino-foreign cooperative universities, including 4 senior management personnel and 6 active teachers. Analysis of the interview content revealed that factors influencing the sustainable development of these universities encompass both external and internal dimensions. Externally, they are influenced by government support, evaluation systems, admission policies, and geopolitical factors. Internally, they are affected by program offerings, the quality of talent cultivation, faculty strength, and internal governance. Overall, the universities demonstrate significant strengths, and their prospects for sustainable development are optimistic.

Keywords: Sino-foreign cooperative universities, sustainable development, influencing factors

1. Introduction

In the contemporary wave of global higher education development, the rise of transnational education has become a significant trend. Particularly in China, the advancement of transnational higher education primarily relies on the model of Sino-foreign cooperative universities, which has demonstrated its unique vitality and value. According to Verbik (2015), by 2009, the number of transnational universities worldwide had reached 162, and by the end of 2017, this number had surged to 263 (Wilkins & Rumbley, 2018). These transnational universities are typically operated by renowned foreign higher education institutions, introducing advanced teaching methods and

ⁱ Correspondence: email 649890020063@dpu.ac.th

management models to the local context, thereby providing students with internationally competitive academic programs and curricula. Notably, by 2016, China had surpassed the UAE to become one of the major host countries for transnational universities (Healey, 2016). Since their inception nearly two decades ago, Sino-foreign cooperative universities have made significant impacts in the field of education with their unique operational models and educational philosophies, garnering widespread recognition and favor among student populations. Consequently, the Chinese Ministry of Education (2020) has explicitly acknowledged the importance of Sino-foreign cooperative education, considering it a crucial model for opening up Chinese education to the world and promoting international educational exchange and cooperation.

As transnational universities rapidly rise, some foreign scholars have expressed cautious views regarding their prospects for sustainable development. Altbach (2015) noted that while the global expansion of transnational universities is unstoppable, their operations face numerous challenges. Shams and Huisman (2012) have analyzed the multiple challenges faced by international transnational universities, highlighting the diverse demands of curriculum design, the difficulty of recruiting outstanding faculty globally, significant cultural and social differences, and compliance issues under different legal systems. Altbach (2015) further pointed out that although the development momentum of transnational universities is strong, their model is essentially akin to a venture capital investment, with long-term stability and sustainability remaining uncertain. This paper aims to explore the factors influencing the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities in China and the pathways to achieving sustainable development. This study can also provide a reference for further research on related topics.

2. The concept of Sino-foreign Cooperation University

The research team at the State University of New York first introduced the term "*transnational universities*" in the academic field to describe higher education institutions that are established and operated across different countries or regions (De Wit & Merckx, 2012). The introduction of this concept provides a new perspective on the development of higher education in the context of globalization. Transnational universities mainly encompass two forms: "*international branch campuses*" and "*transnational cooperative universities*" (Knight, 2016). Legkonogikh et al. (2019) define transnational higher education as higher education activities conducted across national borders, while Knight (2016) further emphasizes the operational independence and the existence of independent campuses for transnational cooperative universities. Stanfield and Wang (2012) conducted an in-depth study on "*full-scale international transnational universities*" in China, defining them as transnational education institutions with independent legal status that fully adopt the curriculum design and management models of their foreign partners.

The Chinese Ministry of Education (2003) explicitly stated that "*Sino-foreign cooperative universities*" specifically refer to higher education institutions established in mainland China through the cooperation between Chinese higher education institutions and those from abroad (including Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan). These institutions primarily recruit students from mainland China, hold a Sino-foreign cooperative education license, have independent campuses in mainland China, and possess independent legal status.

3. Literature Review

In 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) jointly published the "United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)" plan. This plan defined a sustainable university as one that integrates sustainable development principles into its academic, administrative, and operational domains. The sustainable development of a university means that an efficient university can adapt to the local environment, engage with and respond to stakeholder needs, support its core mission and requirements, and reduce its environmental and resource impact through social responsibility (Beringer & Adomssent, 2008). In a global context, the factors influencing the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities, a type of transnational university, are highly complex and can be analyzed from both internal and external perspectives.

3.1 Internal Factors Influencing the Sustainable Development of Transnational Universities

Internal factors affecting the sustainable development of transnational universities generally include the nature of the institution, program offerings, management systems, institutional efficiency, student satisfaction, teaching quality, funding support, faculty levels, and resource localization.

Firstly, in the context of globalization, differences in Eastern and Western contexts lead to various misunderstandings regarding the nature of Sino-foreign cooperative universities. Many scholars, when discussing related topics, often simply refer to transnational cooperative universities in China, such as Ningbo N University, as "*transnational branch campuses in China*" (Wilkins & Rumbley, 2018). This terminology not only fails to accurately reflect the independence and uniqueness of Sino-foreign cooperative universities but also somewhat neglects their sovereign characteristics, potentially leading to deviations in research perspectives.

Secondly, when delving into the program offerings of Sino-foreign cooperative universities, Varghese (2008) found that the current program offerings at transnational cooperative universities exhibit a clear concentration trend. By offering these high-quality and reputable programs, transnational cooperative universities can attract high-caliber students and outstanding faculty, achieve significant accomplishments in academic

research and teaching, and thereby enhance the academic reputation and international ranking of the institution (OECD, 2007). The programs offered undoubtedly influence the sustainable development of the university.

Thirdly, as platforms for educational exchange, transnational cooperative universities face the challenge of effectively integrating management systems from different educational systems to achieve sustainable development. This integration process involves not only the restructuring of school management systems but also the deep integration of diverse cultures and educational philosophies (Legkonogikh et al., 2019).

Fourthly, efficiency is particularly important in the internal management of Sino-foreign cooperative universities. The value of efficiency lies in achieving the maximum output with minimal resource input, a critical consideration for any organizational manager (Schuster et al., 1994). Kezar and Eckel (2004) view efficiency as one of the main challenges faced by organizational management. A scientific and reasonable internal management mechanism can effectively coordinate various resources and improve work efficiency, thereby ensuring the sustainable development of the university.

Fifthly, against the backdrop of rising global higher education costs, the pursuit of learning experiences by students has become increasingly important. When educational costs are comparable to those of the international main campuses, international branch campuses bear the crucial mission of providing advanced facilities and services to ensure that the student learning experience is at least comparable to, if not surpassing, that of the main campuses (Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2012). Sino-foreign cooperative universities need to maintain close ties with their international main campuses, providing students with diverse learning and development opportunities and laying a solid foundation for sustainable development.

Sixthly, teaching quality undoubtedly occupies a central position when discussing the key factors for the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities. However, the differing quality control and assurance standards held by the collaborating institutions present considerable challenges and difficulties in the management of these transnational universities (Lane & Kinser, 2013). To address this challenge, internal teaching quality assurance becomes a crucial strategy for the sustainable development of transnational cooperative education projects (Shao et al., 2021).

Seventhly, to ensure sustainable development, transnational universities must establish a reasonable and diversified revenue structure, including but not limited to tuition fees, student donations, fundraising activities, research and service income, and various endowments (Estermann & Pruvot, 2011). In China, Sino-foreign cooperative universities, while pursuing educational quality and aligning with international standards, also actively adhere to national education laws and regulations, upholding the principle of non-profit education to eliminate public concerns about this unique form of education.

Eighthly, when discussing the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities, the issue of faculty is undoubtedly a crucial core topic. The long-

term stable development of a school depends on a strong faculty team. To maintain the reputation of transnational universities in providing quality education, many institutions adopt various measures, such as leveraging doctoral programs from the main campuses to train local talent, ensuring consistency in teaching methods with the main campuses (Wilkins, 2010).

Lastly, Karam (2018) argues that due to significant cultural differences between countries, directly transplanting foreign resources often faces the challenge of "*local acclimatization*." Therefore, the localization of high-quality foreign educational resources should be given sufficient attention by both parties in Sino-foreign cooperative universities.

3.2 External Factors Influencing the Sustainable Development of Transnational Universities

External factors influencing the sustainable development of transnational universities primarily include local support policies, evaluation and regulatory mechanisms, enrollment policies, adaptability to the local environment, and geopolitical considerations.

Firstly, when deeply exploring the operational mechanisms of Sino-foreign cooperative universities, it is not difficult to find that government policy support plays a crucial role. These policies not only construct the legal framework for the legitimate operation of transnational cooperative universities but also provide solid legal protection (Kezar & Maxwell, 2016). The Chinese government has provided substantial financial support to Sino-foreign cooperative universities, and this financial support and incentives have greatly promoted their sustainable development.

Secondly, in discussing the regulation and development of Sino-foreign cooperative educational institutions, national educational administrative departments bear significant responsibility. These departments are dedicated not only to protecting the legitimate rights and interests of transnational cooperative educational institutions but also to playing a supervisory role in ensuring their standardized operation (Kinser & Lane, 2014). By establishing comprehensive and detailed regulatory mechanisms, the government can monitor the educational activities of schools in real-time, ensuring the fairness of education and the continuous improvement of quality.

Thirdly, the enrollment management of Sino-foreign cooperative universities, as the starting point of talent cultivation, bears the important mission of selecting outstanding talents. The quality of the student source directly affects the subsequent quality of talent cultivation (Karam, 2018), thereby having a profound impact on the long-term development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities.

Fourthly, national vision, as a comprehensive manifestation of a country's political and environmental strategy, significantly influences the development direction of universities. Local laws, regulations, and cultural norms are the foundation for Sino-foreign cooperative universities to integrate into local society. To ensure the long-term stable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities, the participation and

contribution of stakeholders are equally indispensable. In the process of establishing international branch campuses, solid support from the surrounding community is required to instill local and global values in graduates, meet their expectations, and ensure the continued existence of the school (Harding & Lammey, 2011).

Finally, as global higher education organizations have shown unprecedented resilience in coping with the challenges of the pandemic, geopolitical fluctuations have become increasingly prominent. Particularly between the world's two superpowers, the United States and China, there is a growing competitive dynamic often described as "*new cold war*." This situation not only complicates the operation and planning of higher education institutions but also profoundly affects patterns of student mobility and research collaboration (Cantwell et al., 2018).

4. Methodology

This study aims to answer the following question: What are the factors influencing the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities?

For the research methodology, we chose a qualitative approach using semi-structured one-on-one interviews, employing purposive sampling. Qualitative research involves the researcher as the primary instrument, obtaining interpretive understanding through interaction with participants to construct meaning from their behaviors and perspectives (Morse, 2000). Sandelowski (2010) noted that semi-structured interviews require the researcher to maintain some control over the interview direction while encouraging active participation from the interviewees, allowing them to express their opinions within the topic framework. According to Assarroudi et al. (2018), the interview method can gather objective factual data from respondents based on survey needs, and through appropriate probing and guidance, it can obtain novel and in-depth information. In constructing the interview guide, this study focused on the factors influencing the sustainable development and pathway construction of Sino-foreign cooperative universities in Zhejiang Province. The aim is to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for cooperative educational models both within China and globally. After reviewing domestic and international literature and organizing existing research frameworks, preliminary interview questions were developed based on practical research issues. The questions revolve around topics such as: What is the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities? What are the internal and external factors influencing their sustainable development? How can Sino-foreign cooperative universities achieve sustainable development? The specific questions are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Semi-structured interview outline form

Semi-structured interview questions	
1	What do you think constitutes the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities? What are its key characteristics?
2	Sustainability is a significant challenge in the development of Sino-foreign cooperative education. How do you think Sino-foreign cooperative universities can achieve sustainable development?
3	What roles do various stakeholders (e.g., teachers, students, parents, government departments, community) play in the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities?
4	What achievements has your university made in sustainable development? What factors influenced these achievements?
5	What policies and financial support has the government provided in the operation of your university? What role do you think government support plays in the sustainable development of the university?
6	Which departments or agencies are responsible for regulating your university's operations? How do they contribute to the sustainable development of the university?
7	How do you perceive the impact of geopolitical factors on the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities?
8	What programs does your university offer? Why were these programs established? Can you elaborate?
9	What measures has your university taken to ensure teaching quality? How satisfied are students with the teaching quality?
10	Please briefly describe the faculty at your university. What are your university's advantages in attracting excellent faculty?
11	Western universities place significant importance on faculty governance and student autonomy. What are the unique aspects of your university's governance?
12	With the continuous improvement of Chinese universities' academic standards and strength, the gap with foreign universities is gradually narrowing. What are your views on the future development prospects of Sino-foreign cooperative universities?

Purposive sampling refers to the selection of subjects that most closely align with the specific objectives of the study (Smith, 2015). The sample of respondents should possess a certain degree of homogeneity and key similarities related to the research question, allowing for the generation of appropriate and useful information (Miles & Shelvin, 2019). This sampling method can obtain highly representative samples and is one of the most commonly used and effective methods in survey sampling (Guest et al., 2017).

In this study, the researcher selected two Sino-foreign cooperative universities in Zhejiang Province. One of these is the first Sino-foreign cooperative university in China, and the other is the first Sino-American cooperative university in China. Both universities have a relatively long history, making them valuable case studies for sustainable development research. Additionally, interviewees were chosen from senior management and teaching staff at these universities. These individuals were capable of understanding the researcher's intentions and providing precise responses to research-related questions, offering valuable insights. The specific personnel involved are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic data

	Sex	Work unit	Job position	Years of service
Int ¹ .1	F ²	N University, Ningbo	Vice President	6
Int.2	M ³	N University, Ningbo	Deputy Director of the Academic Affairs Office	4
Int.3	M	K University, Wenzhou	Party Secretary	8
Int.4	M	K University, Wenzhou	Vice President	6
Int.5	M	N University, Ningbo	Ethnic Chinese Teacher	12
Int.6	M	N University, Ningbo	Ethnic Chinese Teacher	10
Int.7	F	N University, Ningbo	Foreign Teacher	2
Int.8	F	K University, Wenzhou	Ethnic Chinese Teacher	6
Int.9	F	K University, Wenzhou	Ethnic Chinese Teacher	7
Int.10	M	K University, Wenzhou	Foreign Teacher	3

Note: 1 = Interviewee, 2 = Female, 3 = Male

Interviews were conducted remotely using different digital platforms according to the preferences of the respondents. The interviews were scheduled and conducted from July to September 2023, at pre-arranged dates and times. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes on average. Before starting the interviews, respondents were informed about the study's conditions, including their consent to be recorded. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed (Berg, 2001). The transcriptions were then subjected to qualitative content analysis in line with our research objectives (Creswell, 2012).

5. Presentation and Analysis of the Research Findings

Among the ten respondents who participated in the survey, four senior management personnel repeatedly emphasized that government support is the most crucial factor for the sustainable development of the university. Sino-foreign cooperative universities in China generally have government backing, with their infrastructure often receiving full support from the government. This support not only avoids operational difficulties caused by financial shortages but also ensures the stable and sustainable development of the university. Participants stated:

"[...] The development of the school cannot be separated from government support, including policies and funding. Therefore, schools in China are of a public welfare nature."
(Int.1)

"[...]Having the government as a backer is undoubtedly beneficial, but the efficiency of government decision-making and the strength of supervision somewhat restrict the development of the school." (Int.3)

Establishing an independent cooperative education quality evaluation system is an important way to promote the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities. All ten respondents believed that such a system could comprehensively evaluate the quality of education provided by the university, ensuring fairness and continuous improvement in quality. Participants stated:

"[...]N University has introduced the teaching quality assurance system of N University in the UK and undergoes quality reviews by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)." (Int.6)

"[...]The school's teaching management strictly follows the UK higher education QAA quality system, and in practice, students are very satisfied with it." (Int.7)

The enrollment management of Sino-foreign cooperative universities, as the starting point for talent cultivation, carries the important mission of selecting outstanding talent. Eight out of the ten respondents believed that the quality of the student intake directly affects the subsequent quality of talent cultivation, thereby having a profound impact on the long-term development of the university. Participants stated:

"[...]N University has carried out enrollment work in 30 provinces across the country, with admission scores generally higher than the local key lines, ensuring high-quality student intake." (Int.2)

"[...]From the perspective of the school, high-quality students are more likely to produce high-quality graduates." (Int.4)

From a geopolitical perspective, it can be observed that there is a close relationship between higher education and national strength. Six out of the ten respondents believed that global economic fluctuations and other factors affect the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities. Participants stated:

"[...]The biggest challenge to development is changes in international relations, but I believe the Chinese government will handle the issues between China and the UK well." (Int.1)

"[...]In today's globalized world, higher education has become an important battleground for competition between countries." (Int.3)

The current professional offerings at Sino-foreign cooperative universities show a clear trend of concentration, with eight out of the ten respondents claiming that their school's programs are focused on popular fields. Participants stated:

"[...]With the development and accumulation of resources, our school has added some cutting-edge majors, such as engineering, environmental studies, and new materials." (Int.2)

"[...]Schools tend to choose majors with lower investment costs and a broader audience, such as business, liberal arts, and information science." (Int.4)

The interviews revealed that all ten respondents claimed that the quality of talent cultivation at their school has been recognized by students, with satisfaction levels higher than the global average. Participants stated:

"[...]In the 2022 undergraduate cohort, 87.2% chose to continue their studies, distributed across 23 countries and regions worldwide." (Int.3)

"[...]The school has cultivated tens of thousands of high-quality graduates who are distributed around the world, with some already becoming industry elites." (Int.9)

All ten respondents believed that the sustainable development of the university relies on a high-quality teaching team. The teachers at Sino-foreign cooperative universities, both Chinese and foreign, are the providers, organizers, guides, participants, and collaborators in education. One participant stated:

"[...]Only with high-quality and dedicated faculty can high teaching quality be guaranteed, ensuring the sustainable development of the school." (Int.5)

"[...]Over 200 teachers from more than 40 countries and regions, including graduates from prestigious universities such as Columbia and Cambridge, teach here." (Int.8)

Regarding school governance, six of the ten respondents claimed that Sino-foreign cooperative universities generally adopt British and American management models and strengthen faculty governance and student autonomy. Participants stated:

"[...]The school adopts the management model of N University in the UK, with the administration focusing on providing services and not overly interfering with the teaching work of the faculty." (Int.1)

"[...]Faculty governance is implemented within the school, mainly in academic and teaching fields. The school also encourages student organizations to be autonomous and self-reliant." (Int.10)

6. Discussion – Conclusions

6.1 Internal Factors Influencing the Sustainable Development of Sino-foreign Cooperative Universities

The analysis of participants' responses also revealed that the internal factors affecting the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities mainly include program offerings, quality of talent cultivation, faculty strength, and internal governance. Firstly, in the in-depth exploration of the program offerings at Sino-foreign cooperative universities, Wang's (2021) research also revealed a clear trend of concentration in current program offerings, primarily focusing on popular fields such as computer information technology, accounting and finance, and business administration. This phenomenon reflects a strategic consideration in introducing high-quality educational resources at Sino-foreign cooperative universities (Cheng et al., 2017).

Secondly, when discussing the key factors for the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities, teaching quality undoubtedly occupies a central position (Gong, 2014). For example, at N University, its educational quality is not only jointly supervised by the Chinese government and the UK N University but also subject to strict review by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This review process includes three stages: first, the students' exam papers are initially assessed at the local institution and then sent to the corresponding faculty at N University in the UK for a second evaluation; subsequently, the QAA designates external agencies to conduct three rounds of sampling evaluations to finalize the students' academic results (Roberts, 2015). Although the review method has been adjusted from initial full submission to sample submission as student numbers have increased annually, this system remains effectively implemented.

Thirdly, in the practice of incentivizing faculty and student affairs personnel and replicating academic and campus experiences and traditions, branch campuses face many challenges and doubts (Altbach, 2011). Taking the international branch campus in the United Arab Emirates as an example, despite the majority of its faculty being expatriates, the university must hire nationals according to specified quotas due to the impetus of nationalization policies (Wilkins, 2010). This policy adjustment undoubtedly has a profound impact on the composition of faculty and teaching quality. The Ministry of Education of China (2016) has also made clear requirements regarding the faculty of Sino-foreign cooperative educational projects.

Lastly, Sino-foreign cooperative universities need to establish a management system that not only meets international standards but also adapts to local regulations, educational policies, and teaching requirements (Zhuang & Guo, 2024). Most of the existing Sino-foreign cooperative universities adopt a president responsibility system

under the leadership of a board of directors, but schools also emphasize faculty governance and student governance (Sturman et al., 2018).

6.2 External Factors Influencing the Sustainable Development of Sino-foreign Cooperative Universities

From the analysis of participants' responses, it was found that the external factors affecting the sustainable development of Sino-foreign cooperative universities mainly include the following four aspects: government support, evaluation and regulatory mechanisms, enrollment policies, and geopolitics.

Firstly, government policy support at the financial level has provided significant backing for Sino-foreign cooperative universities. This financial support and fiscal incentives have greatly promoted the sustainable development of these universities. As pointed out in Han's (2017) study, the infrastructure construction of Sino-foreign cooperative universities in China often receives full support from the government, which not only avoids operational difficulties caused by financial shortages but also ensures the stable development of the university.

Secondly, in discussing the regulation of Sino-foreign cooperative educational institutions, the national education administration departments shoulder significant responsibility. The government should establish comprehensive and detailed regulatory mechanisms to monitor the operational behavior of schools in real time, ensuring fairness and continuous improvement of education quality. This is also an important principle emphasized by the Ministry of Education of China (2018).

Thirdly, the enrollment targets set by transnational universities are often difficult to achieve (Witte, 2010). Current market size, admission conditions, students' language and academic abilities are all factors that pose challenges to the enrollment work of Sino-foreign cooperative universities (Knight, 2016). The diversity and differences within the student body also impact the educational quality of the schools (Altbach, 2010).

Lastly, geopolitical factors are one of the significant influences on the international mobility of higher education. Science, as a field that seeks truth and knowledge, has always been regarded as a domain that transcends political, social, and cultural interests (Merton, 1973). However, in reality, scientific research is often influenced by various external factors, particularly within universities, where scientific activities are also shaped by political and economic pressures (Owen-Smith, 2001). In today's globalized world, higher education has become a crucial battleground for national competition

7. Recommendations

This study comprehensively explored the multifaceted factors affecting the sustainable development of two Sino-foreign cooperative universities in Zhejiang. The following recommendations are proposed for Sino-foreign cooperative universities:

- **Align with National Development Strategies:** Universities should serve the national development strategy by supporting local educational equity and contributing to the overall progress of the nation.
- **Support Local Educational Equity:** Enhance efforts to balance educational resources and opportunities within the local context, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education.
- **Promote University-Industry Collaboration:** Foster mutually beneficial partnerships between universities and industries to facilitate knowledge transfer, innovation, and economic development.
- **Enhance International Brand Influence:** Strengthen the international brand influence of the university through global engagement, high-quality programs, and strategic partnerships with renowned international institutions.
- **Improve Faculty Compensation and Career Development:** Enhance the remuneration and career development environment for faculty members to attract and retain top talent.
- **Strengthen Research Infrastructure and Innovation Capacity:** Invest in research platforms and cultivate innovation abilities to foster cutting-edge research and technological advancements.
- **Optimize Student Learning Experience and Personal Development:** Focus on improving the learning experience and supporting the personalized development of students through diverse academic and extracurricular opportunities.
- **Continuous Improvement of Teaching Quality:** Maintain a relentless focus on improving teaching quality through rigorous assessment, professional development for educators, and adopting best practices in pedagogy.
- **Refine Scholarship Systems to Motivate Outstanding Students:** Enhance scholarship programs to recognize and reward academic excellence, motivating students to achieve their highest potential.
- **Ensure Campus Safety for a Harmonious Educational Environment:** Prioritize campus safety to create a secure and conducive environment for education, fostering a harmonious and supportive community.

Comprehensive consideration and implementation of these recommendations will enable Sino-foreign cooperative universities to stand out in the competitive landscape of international education and achieve their long-term and robust sustainable development goals.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Authors

Mang Lu is a teacher at NingBo City College of Vocational Technology, NingBo, China, currently pursuing a doctoral degree in educational management at Dhurakij Pundit University in Thailand.

Dr. Man Jiang is an Assistant Professor at Chinese International College, Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand.

References

- Altbach, P. G. (2010). Why branch campuses may be unsustainable. *International Higher Education*, 58. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2010.58.8467>
- Altbach, P. G. (2015). The challenges of internationalization in higher education. *International Higher Education*, 80, 5-7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2020.1820898>
- Assarroudi, A., Heshmati Nabavi, F., Armat, M. R., Ebadi, A., & Vaismoradi, M. (2018). Directed qualitative content analysis: the description and elaboration of its underpinning methods and data analysis process. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 23(1), 42-55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987117741667>
- Berg B. (2001). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences, 4th edn.* Boston.
- Beringer, A., & Adomssent, M. (2008). Sustainability assessment in higher education – review and future directions. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 16(12), 1225-1238. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2008.02.012>
- Cantwell, B., Coate, H., & King, R. (Eds.). (2018). *Handbook on the politics of higher education.* Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Cheng, M., Kitagawa, F., & Osborne, M. (2017). The evolution of internationalisation strategy: A case study of the University of Nottingham. *International Journal of Knowledge-Based Development*, 8(3), 292-308. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJKBD.2017.086406>
- Creswell J. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research, 4th edn.* Boston.
- De Wit, H., & Merckx, G. (2012). *The history of internationalization of higher education.* SAGE.
- Estermann, T., & Pruvot, E. B. (2011). *Global university rankings and their impact.* European University Association.
- Gong, Y. X. (2014). Problems in Sino-Foreign Cooperative Educational Projects and Countermeasures. *Journal of Jishou University (Natural Sciences Edition)*, 35(5), 93. <https://zkxb.jsu.edu.cn/EN/Y2014/V35/I5/93>
- Guest, G., Namey, E. E., & McKenna, K. (2017). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 29(1), 3-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- Hall, T., Gray, T., Downey, G., & Singh, M. (Eds.). (2018). *The Globalisation of higher education: Developing internationalised education research and practice.* Springer.
- Han, X. (2017). The Challenges and Benefits of Transnational Higher Education: A Case Study of Sino-Foreign Cooperation University in China. In: Collins, C. (Eds), *University-Community Engagement in the Asia Pacific* (PP.41-55). International and

- Development Education. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45222-7_4
- Harding, N., & Lammey, R. (2011). The data deluge: What does it mean for academic publishers? *Learned Publishing*, 24(4), 283-289. <https://doi.org/10.1087/20110411>
- Healey, N. M. (2016). The Challenges of Leading an International Branch Campus: The “Lived Experience” of In-Country Senior Managers. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 20(1), 61-78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315315602928>
- Karam, J. (2018). *Sustainability of international branch campuses: A case study of management practices in the Arabian Gulf*. [Doctor’s Thesis, University of Calgary]. Scholar. Google. https://scholar.google.com.hk/scholar?hl=zh-CN&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Sustainability+of+international+branch+campuses%3A+A+case+study+of+management+practices+in+the+Arabian+Gulf.&btnG=
- Kezar, A., & Eckel, P. D. (2004). Examining the institutional transformation process: The importance of sense making, interrelated strategies, and balance. *Research in Higher Education*, 46(3), 251-275. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:RIHE.0000025692.92934.8a>
- Kezar, A., & Maxwell, W. (2016). Enhancing governance in higher education: The opportunities and challenges of multi-level governance. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 22(2), 77-90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2016.1144583>
- Kinser, K., & Lane, J. E. (2014). Managing the oversight of international branch campuses in higher education. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 24(3), 161-176. <https://doi.org/10.1787/17269822>
- Knight, J. (2016). Transnational education remodeled: Toward a common TNE framework and definitions. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 20(1), 34-47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315315602927>
- Lane, J. E., & Kinser, K. (2013). Five models of international branch campus ownership. *International Higher Education*, 70, 9-11. https://scholar.google.com.hk/scholar?cluster=11883677380540672243&hl=zh-CN&as_sdt=0,5
- Legkonogikh, A., Mezinova, G., Popova, S., & Karimova, C. (2019). Development of cross-border education in regional University. In *SHS Web of Conferences*, (Vol. 70, p. 02007). EDP Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20197002007>
- Marjerison, R. K., Rahman, J. M., & Li, Z. (2020). Students’ attitudes towards distance education: A comparative study between Sino-foreign cooperative universities and typical universities in China. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies*, 25. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3693978
- Merton, R. K. (1973). *The sociology of science: Theoretical and empirical investigations*. University of Chicago press.
- Miles, J. N., & Shelvin, M. (2019). Meaning-making in qualitative research with youth experiencing homelessness: A focus on resilience. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75(2), 446-467. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12313>
- Ministry of Education of China, PRC. (2020). *The Ministry of Education and eight other government departments issued opinions to accelerate and expand the opening-up of*

- education in the new era.*
http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/s5147/202006/t20200623_467784.html
- Morse, J. M. (2000). Determining sample size. *Qualitative health research*, 10(1), 3-5.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732001291181>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2007). *Cross-border tertiary education: A way towards capacity development*. World Bank.
- Owen-Smith, J. (2001). Managing laboratory work through skepticism: Processes of evaluation and control. *American Sociological Review*, 66(3), 427-452.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240106600306>
- Roberts, G. W. (2015). International University Education: Creating and Managing the MSc Course in Engineering Surveying and Geodesy at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China. *International Journal of Chinese Education*, 4(1), 68-90.
https://brill.com/view/journals/ijce/4/1/article-p68_5.xml
- Sandelowski, M. (2010). What's in a name? Qualitative description revisited. *Research in nursing & health*, 33(1), 77-84. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.20362>
- Schuster, J. H., Finkelstein, M. J., Glassick, C. E., & Mandel, H. (1994). The uses and abuses of faculty evaluation. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 26(3), 26-37.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.1994.10544667>
- Shams, F., & Huisman, J. (2012). Private higher education and sustainability: The case of Iran. *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development*, 6(2), 173-184.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0973408212448744>
- Shao C F, Chen S H, Gao J L, He Y, Zhou H L. (2021). Evaluation of Sustainable Development of Tourism Cities Based on SDGs and Tourism Competitiveness Index: Analysis of 221 Prefecture-Level Cities in China. *Sustainability* 13(22). 12338.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su132212338>
- Smith, J. A. (2015). *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*. SAGE.
<http://digital.casalini.it/9781473933415> - Casalini id: 5018480
- Stanfield, D., & Wang, Q. (2012). Branch campuses in China. *International Higher Education*, 69, 13-15. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2012.69.8634>
- Sturman, P., Zheng, Y., Peng, L., & Lamb, D. (2018). Students as partners: the development of an extensive reading program at the Ningbo Campus of the University of Nottingham. *The Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change*, 4(1).
<https://www.journals.studentengagement.org.uk/index.php/studentchangeagent/article/view/744>
- UNESCO. (2004). *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)*. UNESCO Headquarters.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000144585>
- Varghese, N. V. (2008). *Globalization of higher education and cross-border student mobility*. Paris: UNESCO, International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Verbik, L. (2015). The international branch campus: Models and trends. *International Higher Education*, 46, 14-15. <http://www.obhe.ac.uk/products/reports/>.

- Wang, Q. (2021, December). Strategic Analysis of Sino-Foreign Higher Education Cooperative Universities Based on SWOT Model. In *2021 4th International Conference on Humanities Education and Social Sciences (ICHESS 2021)* (pp. 2243-2249). Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211220.387>
- Wilkins, S. (2010). Higher education in the United Arab Emirates: An analysis of the outcomes of significant increases in supply and competition. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32(4), 389-400. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2010.491112>
- Wilkins, S., & Balakrishnan, M. S. (2012). Internationalization of higher education: Implications for quality assurance and accreditation. *Quality in Higher Education*, 18(1), 117-131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2012.671733>
- Wilkins, S., & Rumbley, L. (2018). What a branch campus is: A revised definition. *International Higher Education*, 93, 12-14. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.0.93.10416>
- Witte, J. F. (2010). Internationalization of higher education: A US perspective. *Higher Education in Europe*, 35(1), 5-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03797720903518948>
- Zhuang, H., Hu, L., & Guo, J. (2024). Understanding and practices of global competence in Sino-foreign cooperative universities. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 21(04). <https://doi.org/10.53761/aayefg73>

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).