

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE OVERSEAS JOINT VENTURE  
UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR ROLE IN CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of  
the University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
Public Policy

Charlotte

2021

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## ABSTRACT

PING MAO. The development of Chinese overseas joint venture universities and their role in Chinese higher education.  
(Under the direction of DR. ROSLYN ARLIN MICKELSON)

This dissertation investigates a newly emerging phenomenon in Chinese higher education in which a Chinese university partners with an overseas university to open a new university campus in China which began in 2004. This form of university was established in the context of economic growth and education reform in Chinese society. It has brought a change to the rebuilding of nonpublic higher education in China since the late 1980s. It also reinforces the emphasis on internationalization and diversification of higher education set by Chinese government for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, as a joint venture in higher education, this form of education is still unknown to many education scholars with respect to its formation mechanisms and motivations. Moreover, given the changing landscape of Chinese higher education, the current status and future prospects of this type of university are worthy of study considering its benefits as well as challenges for Chinese and the global higher education development. What is more, the social, economic, and policy implications of these universities are even more enormous than its education perspective.

This dissertation is an exploratory case study involving intensive interviews with seven administrators and nine students from four institutions in this study along with content analysis of mission statements and school documents involving all nine institutions in this group. Findings suggest that the emergence of joint venture universities is consistent with the growing trend of globalization and internationalization

in worldwide higher education development. Motivations and goals of institutions in pursuing this cooperation may vary among countries. China's governmental involvement in this kind of education signifies a new trend in higher education collaboration that incorporates governmental interest in political, economic, and global pursuits rather than focusing on the education per se. Thus, this type of joint venture universities is neither public nor private. An unexpected finding is that the emergence of this form of education did not improve education inequality existing in Chinese higher education due to geographical location but reinforce the reproduction of inequality. Also, the small number of special joint venture universities in China seem to aim more for advancing China's international goals to engage on the global stage, foster China's active globalization efforts, and prepare Chinese students to be academically and socially ready for globalization. These findings thus have substantial implications for policymakers in relevant areas and help them in policymaking decisions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support and assistance of numerous individuals. First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to Dr. Mickelson, my advisor and mentor from my Master's thesis to my dissertation, for her continuous support, encouragement and patience throughout my academic endeavor. Her wisdom and expertise in the field of education have led me through numerous difficulties during the dissertation study. I would also like to thank Dr. Scheid for her guidance in shaping the qualitative approach applied for this dissertation and inspiration on my pursuit of academic goal. I am also indebted to Dr. Zhao whose knowledge in the organizational theory helped me gain a focused lens on issues related to institutions and individuals. I would also like to say thank you to Dr. Wang for his insightful advice on this topic and extensive knowledge on Chinese higher education. Finally, I would like to pay special gratitude to Dr. Shawn Long who had been on my committee. We lost him earlier this year. I still remember his passion for this project and his invaluable advice on methodological issues.

I would also like to extend my thanks to professors in the Public Policy Program with whom I have had the pleasure to work and who provided considerable support on my academic journey. I also appreciate the support I received from my fellow students in this program and other departments who helped translate and check interview transcriptions for this study.

Specifically, I would like to thank all participants in this study who shared their experiences and perceptions in interviews. I want to thank my friends and all others who assisted me during my visit to their campuses and helped me connect with participants.

Finally, my appreciation goes out to my parents, my husband, and my son for their encouragement and support. Without their love and understanding in the past few years, it would be impossible to complete my PhD study.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, higher education has stepped into a new era that embraces globalization. Universities have become more active in terms of recruiting international students and faculty, sending domestic students abroad, and setting up branch campuses in other countries (Cabrera & Renard, 2015; Jane, 2015). During the process, developed countries that host a large number of world's prestigious universities are seeking ways to expand their influence globally by opening branch campuses or joint programs in destination countries (Varghese, 2009). Developing countries, on the other hand, are in urgent need of international education resources to promote their education quality (Akar, 2010; Hayhoe et al., 2011).

Amid the increasing cooperation among countries and universities, a new form of joint venture universities emerged in China in 2004. This new form of higher education institutions was created through partnership formed between a Chinese university, most often a public institution, and an overseas university, which can be either a public or a private institution. The universities taking the new form have special features that distinguish them from a majority of Chinese universities. They are expensive, charging higher tuition to students than other universities in China. Their overseas partner universities are mostly prestigious in their home countries and thus set similarly high standards for the new universities. They use English as instruction language in class. Their graduates receive not only diplomas from the new universities but degrees from their overseas partners. They have greater percentage of international students compared to other Chinese domestic universities. Nearly half of the faculty come from overseas

countries or overseas partner universities. And the most important point is, despite having strong ties to their partners, they are independent entities. Even though the partner universities invested heavily in financing, academics, and other related educational resources, the new form universities are not affiliated with either partner university. As of 2020, China had nine institutions of this type, located mainly in east and southeast coastal cities of China.

### **1.1 Context of the Study**

This new education phenomenon emerged during the period of higher education expansion in China and the ongoing internationalization of education. In 1999, the Chinese central government adopted a policy that called for higher education expansion aiming to increase the gross enrollment ratio to 15% by 2010 (Wang & Liu, 2011; Yeung, 2013). As a result, China has seen a significant increase in student enrollment at various types of higher education. From 1998 to 2004 when the first joint venture university under this study was established, student enrollment rose from 1.08 million to 4.47 million, up 347% (Wan, 2006). In the meantime, the number of regular colleges and universities increased from 1,022 to 1,731, a growth of 70% (Chinese Ministry of Education, 1998, 2007).

Along with expansion in enrollment, higher education cooperation between China and other countries has experienced an unprecedented growth (Gide et al., 2010; Rhoads et al., 2014). In 2001, China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and stepped up its efforts to cooperate with other countries in higher education. From 2002 to 2020, the joint programs and institutions approved by Chinese Ministry of Education increased from 712 to 2,332. Of the latter 1,230 were at the higher education level and involved 36

countries and regions (Xinhua News Agency, 2020). Over 800 overseas institutions and 700 Chinese counterparts took part in this process. The nine joint venture universities that this dissertation investigates are part of those that represented the rapid growth of Chinese-foreign higher education cooperation over this time period.

The unprecedented wave of international cooperation has also brought a growing number of international students to study in China. China became one of the top five destination countries for international students in 2007, following the US, the UK, France, and Germany (Hvistendahl, 2008). Over past years, China saw a continuous growth of international students seeking to study in this country. In 2019, the number reached nearly 400,000, more than doubled from 2007 (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2008; Shandong Education, 2020).

Meanwhile, China became the largest country of origin sending students abroad. According to statistics released by UNESCO in 2006, China sent the largest number of international students abroad, accounting for 14% of the world's total (UNESCO, 2006). In 2019, there were more than 0.7 million Chinese students going abroad to study at various levels of education in overseas countries, showing a steady increase over previous year (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2020).

One of the major factors that has driven the outbound flow of Chinese students seeking international study is considered to be the Chinese economic boom and the rise of middle class in this nation (Briggs, 2018; Cheng et al., 2017; Rhoads et al., 2014). Economic success in the last decades has made China one of the world's largest economies. China's GDP per capita has grown over ten-fold since 2000, reaching \$10,261 in 2019 (The World Bank). The income increase has led to a rise of middle class

in urban China due to urban-rural income gap that still exists (Tobin, 2011; Yuan et al., 2020). The new wealth has inspired new expectations for middle-class Chinese including higher education aspirations (Briggs, 2018). Large expenses in overseas study were no longer an obstacle for affluent Chinese, especially upper middle-class families (China Power Team, 2017, 2020). In addition, the national policy that encouraged overseas study for individual Chinese citizens began in 2003 (Xinhuanet, 2018). Since then, Chinese citizens who would like to go abroad to study would not go through complex procedures and need relative official approvals as before. All these factors contributed to the emergence of joint venture universities this study explores and their success in later years.

Another significant issue that underlies the joint venture universities is the ongoing privatization of higher education in China which has enabled restructuring of Chinese higher education. Historically, Chinese private universities arose in the 1890s and remained in higher education system until the early 1950s when a Soviet model was introduced and radically transformed Chinese higher education system (Chen, 2013; Ennew & Yang, 2009; Hayhoe et al., 2011). From 1949 to 1956, the old institutions that were private were either transformed or merged into public ones under the Soviet model and based on governmental intention to control higher education institutions (Wang, 2014). After nearly three decades of disappearance from Chinese higher education system, private institutions, however, reemerged in the early 1980s. China's shift to a market economy and the increasing social need for more seats in colleges acted as drivers for this change. Moreover, the Chinese central government reconsidered building private institutions as a supplement to the dominance of public education so as to revitalize



higher education in the new era of globalization (Li, 2012; Zha, 2006). Since the 1980s, higher education in the private sector has gained propitious development and evolved with a variety of education forms. The new form of joint venture universities that this dissertation investigates is one of those that has developed in the Chinese context of higher education privatization.

Besides the new wave of privatization in higher education, joint venture universities are not completely new in China. Far back to the years before 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded, foreign invested universities already existed (Perry & Tu, 2019; Rosenbaum, 2015; Zhao & Sun, 2020). One of the most prominent universities was Yenching University, which was founded by John Leighton Stuart in 1919 in Beijing and incorporated four Christian schools from America and Britain. After over three decades of operation, it was closed in 1952 and part of it merged into the present Peking University, Tsinghua University, and three other public universities. As an earlier example of Sino-foreign cooperative universities in China, Yenching University exemplified efforts and practices in higher education collaboration between China and foreign countries (Rosenbaum, 2015).

The reemergence and growth of joint venture universities in contemporary China also reflects the trend in higher education globalization. Globalization is shaping higher education and is in turn influenced by higher education (Cabrera & Renard, 2015). From Wallerstein's "world-systems" theory to a view of globalization as a way to effect new capitalism, the conception of globalization is multifaceted which may enable higher education policy makers to reconsider the benefits and challenges that come with higher education globalization (Carnoy, 1974, 1999; Wallerstein, 2000, 2004, 2005; Zajda,

2010). Whether higher education globalization has encouraged the transfer of services and resources across countries and improved the education in developing world or resulted in greater inequality that benefits new capitalism is a complex issue behind this phenomenon.

This dissertation focuses on issues related to this new form of joint ventures. The joint venture form is different from widespread models such as international branch campus or joint programs adopted in China and other countries. This dissertation presents an overall description of the nine institutions that have been established so far in this special category and provide an insightful understanding of this educational phenomenon in contemporary China. In particular, this dissertation examines the mechanism that lies behind the emergence of these joint venture universities and the effects they bring to Chinese as well as global higher education development. It also explores policy implications in related areas.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

This new form of Sino-foreign joint venture university is a phenomenon that has drawn the increasing attention of educators, scholars, and researchers in recent years. Existing literature covering Chinese higher education largely referred to this type of education as an example of internationalization and globalization pursued by Chinese institutions (Ennew & Yang, 2009; Gide et al., 2010; Hayhoe et al., 2011, Zha, 2006). Yet few researchers so far have adequately investigated the phenomenon regarding several important aspects. First, there has been little research that systematically examined the factors that contributed to the formation of the new joint venture universities. Previous research suggests that Chinese universities may differ from

overseas partners in seeking this cooperation (Huang, 2007; Julius & Leventhal, 2014; Montgomery, 2016). However, it is unclear in what ways they differ from one another in building up this collaboration, especially regarding the new form of joint venture universities that has taken shape over the last two decades. Second, institutions, stakeholders, and their interconnection in shaping the new universities are worthy of study but are absent in current literature. How and why students choose this type of university from among the changing landscape of Chinese higher education options and whether the choice has any impact on the design of this type of university or vice versa need further exploration in order to deepen our understanding of this phenomenon. Third, existing research focuses on benefits and risks concerning university partnership, but less is known about this form of joint ventures and what impacts they will have on global higher education collaboration (Healey, 2016; Pan, 2013; Weston, 2015; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012). Also, considering the newness and uniqueness of this type of university, there is a need to explore the educational outcomes it will bring for students. From a policy perspective, whether or not the emergence and growth of joint venture universities has increased higher education access for college seekers is of particular interest for policymakers. This dissertation thus attempts to fill the void by exploring the convergence of political, social, economic, and educational forces that have shaped new opportunities in higher education.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

Based on the aforementioned issues, this dissertation aims to address the following research questions.

1. What factors play a role in the formation of these joint venture universities?

2. How does the range of motivations, goals, and purposes of overseas universities align with the Chinese partner universities?
3. What benefits and challenges do these new forms of education bring to Chinese higher education?
4. What are the intended and unintended consequences of new forms of education?
5. What is the future of the new form of joint venture universities in China?

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

This dissertation research aims to explore broadly the influence of joint venture universities that emerged as a new and distinctive form of higher education collaboration in China and around the world. It intends to look into details concerning historical, political, economic, and social forces that contribute to the context in which these forms of joint venture universities have developed. By describing and cataloguing the current status of the nine universities with overseas partners, this dissertation attempts to uncover the mechanisms that underlie the formation and operation of Chinese-overseas university partnership, to explore the likely effects they have on Chinese higher education, and to identify what niche these institutions will fill in the Chinese higher education landscape. It also investigates the implications for social and educational equality from a policy perspective. In addition, it addresses the issues of stratification, globalization, marketization, privatization, and expansion in higher education. The study highlights policy implications that underline issues related to identification of joint ventures in national higher education mainstream as evidenced in China, inequality of educational opportunities, and the awareness of global trend in higher education cooperation. Finally,

the dissertation explores possible informal outcomes of the initiative with respect to China's emerging role as an international actor in geopolitics, foreign relations, and international development.

### **1.5 Significance of Study**

The growth of Chinese higher education has made it one of the most important countries in international education. Cooperation with universities outside of China has been thriving in the last two decades. Existing literature has paid attention to this growing trend but failed to provide a holistic description of joint venture universities this study focuses on. This dissertation fills the gap by exploring the governmental, institutional, and individual factors that are involved in the formation of these new universities. It contributes to further understanding of education cooperation that has taken place in China and around the world. In particular, the establishment of joint ventures is not only fulfilling the goals pursued by institutions in the process of globalization but heightening national influence on the global stage. It increases the awareness of inequality in educational opportunities that was largely neglected in previous research. This dissertation thus has enormous implications for higher education actors and policymakers for future work.

In addition, this study can be of values for various types of higher education institutions that are looking for international cooperation. Public universities in China and other countries are able to learn from this type of cooperation to manage their own operation that involve international participation in terms of teaching, research, and other activities. Similarly, as a member of nonpublic universities in China, joint venture universities led a new trend in institutional development different from traditional

universities, which can be a model for other forms of nonpublic or private universities in China. Also, the gains and loss, opportunities and challenges experienced by joint venture universities have great values for followers in this area and for others that attempt to seek cooperation with China or expand globally in other countries.

Other than institutions, this study can help policymakers in Chinese higher education and international higher education cooperation address the most recent concerns in relative areas and make more effective policy decisions. University leaders who are interested in Chinese higher education will be able to have deeper understanding of this type of cooperation before they establish successful engagement with China. Students and parents who are interested in attending joint venture universities will have an opportunity to know about this type of education which will aid their decisions.

Overall, this dissertation lays a foundation for future research on this type of higher education cooperation. It sheds light on the way on how to manage global higher education collaboration that can benefit both nations, institutions, and individuals.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overall review of literatures on Chinese overseas joint venture universities operated in China, with a special focus on their relevance to Chinese higher education system. It covers the changing landscape of Chinese higher education, access and equity in higher education, university choice, and cross-border higher education. Boudon's theory on social position and organizational theory on optimal distinctiveness serve as two theoretical frameworks for understanding the findings and policy implications arising from this study.

### **2.1 The Changing Landscape of Chinese Higher Education**

#### ***A Shift from Soviet Model to A Mixed One with European and The U.S. Influences***

The modern higher education in China can be dated back to the late 19th century when a number of church-affiliated universities opened up in cities such as Tianjin, Shanghai, and Beijing (Hayhoe et al., 2011; Rhoads et al., 2014). One of the most prominent universities was Yenching University, which was founded in 1919 by an American missionary John Leighton Stuart in Beijing (Rosenbaum, 2015). St. John's University in Shanghai was another well-known Christian college built with an American model of higher education (Perry & Tu, 2019). Christian higher education helped shape the Chinese higher education system even though it soon gave away to institutions built on Japanese and western models (Zha, 2011).

The first university providing four-year college degree in China was Peiyang Wester Study College, which was founded in 1895 by an American educator Charles Daniel Tenney (Tianjin University). It later developed to Peiyang University. The university was built on the model of American education and aimed to foster talents with

new scientific and technological skills. In 1951, Peiyang University merged with Hebei Institute of Technology and was renamed as Tianjin University. Tianjin University, along with Peking University, Fudan University and Tsinghua University, were among the first to follow the western model and pursue the national orientation (Rhoads et al., 2014). In the 1920s through 1940s, China saw a variety of higher education institutions coexisting in China, including national universities, church-affiliated or missionary institutions, private universities, and some other forms of higher education (Ennew & Yang, 2009).

When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the Chinese higher education was characterized by a high diversity with various forms that existed in a state of anarchy due to the destruction of World War II and subsequent civil war. In the early 1950s, the Chinese government decided to adopt the Soviet model to reshuffle its higher education system (Chen, 2013; Mok, 2005; Zhao, 2009). Ideological and political considerations are the main reasons for Chinese adoption of this model (Wang, 2014). The Soviet model was characterized as highly specialized. Based on where graduates would work, institutions were categorized into different industries, such as telecommunications, transportation, manufacturing, or medicine. Influenced by the Soviet model, the Chinese government created ten categories for the nation's universities including science and engineering, medicine and pharmacology, agriculture, forestry, arts, law and political science, education, economics and finance, physical education, and foreign language. The majority of institutions were managed by ministries at different sectors (e.g. agricultural universities were managed by the Ministry of Agriculture), with only comprehensive, polytechnical, and education under the Ministry of Higher Education at that time.



Following the Soviet model, the Chinese higher education system adopted a centralized national instruction system with a unified curriculum and textbooks. Teaching was standardized in higher education institutions (Wang, 2014). Research was separated from teaching (Hayhoe et al., 2011). The Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), which was founded in 1949, serves as China's top national scientific think tank and academic governing body, along with a variety of research institutes under different national industrial ministries. Universities merely served as teaching bodies at that time.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s following the end of Cultural Revolution and the beginning of Chinese economic reform, higher education in China began to shift its focus from the Soviet model to a model incorporating more of western experiences. The higher education system once grounded deeply in the former Soviet Union's experience, again turned back to ideals represented by the U.S. and Europe for development. The higher education reform includes the merging of specialized universities to create comprehensive universities and decentralization of government control in higher education (Rhoads et al., 2014; Yang, 2015). As a result, a two-tiered education governance system has emerged. Some studies characterized this phenomenon as institutional stratification (Hu et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2016). At the upper level, the Ministry of Education administers a small number of key institutions such as Peking University and Tsinghua University. At the lower level, provincial governments take more responsibilities for coordinating higher education development in their jurisdictions. As of July 2017, there are 75 higher education institutions at the national level and approximately 2,000 institutions at the provincial or local level (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2017c).

The hierarchical phenomenon in Chinese higher education system creates different goals for different types of universities. The national-level universities are assigned the role of competing for global excellence and leadership. By comparison, the provincial- or local-level colleges and universities have absorbed most of the increased enrollment over past decades. National-level university graduates are more likely to find high-paying jobs in labor market where their skills and knowledge are welcomed (Yu, 2017). By comparison, local college graduates are pushed to secondary job markets, which are characterized by low wages and high turnover (Zha, 2011).

In the meantime, research once again returned to universities along with the reform of higher education. With the national ambition to develop world-class research universities, there is an urgent need to expand and advance research capacity at national level universities. Within the first decade of the 21st century, Chinese universities did see a growth of research investment from US\$ 1.1 billion to US\$ 6.7 billion (Hu et al., 2017). However, a great amount of the money was allocated to national level universities with little given to provincial or local colleges and universities. Universities, especially those at the provincial or local level, are still facing insufficient funding to support their research activities.

### ***Reemergence and Growth of Nonpublic Higher Education***

Long before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, private higher education had existed for a century. Missionary schools were among the earliest forms of private higher education that appeared in China around the year 1900 (Liu, 2005; Zha, 2006). From the early 1900s through 1949, more than 40% of Chinese universities were private as compared to other forms of higher education (Liu, 2005). Lin

(1999) further reaffirmed that China had 93 private universities in 1949 as compared to a total of 223 colleges and universities in that year. However, due to the influence of Soviet model, China began to turn private higher education institutions into public. In 1956, all colleges and universities became public under the administration of either the national education department or different industrial ministries and local governments (Huang, 2005; Mok, 2005).

In the early 1980s following years of social and political upheaval associated with Cultural Revolution and other political movements, the Chinese government began to rebuild its public higher education system and private higher education as a response to economic reform launched by the government at that time. In 1982, the first nonpublic higher education institution, Zhonghua Shehui University reemerged in Beijing (Beijing Professional Business Institute; Zha, 2006). Recognizing that public higher education sector could not provide sufficient services to satisfy social needs and parental expectations, the government made new efforts to engage nonpublic sector in higher education service. From 1982 to 2017, the number of nonpublic higher education institutions grew from merely a few to over 700 (Zhou et al., 2018).

The rise of private higher education brings dynamics and diversity to Chinese higher education system. On the one hand, it creates more educational opportunities in response to increasing social and market needs. Wei (2009) found that in economically developed regions such as Zhejiang Province, the establishment of private higher education institutions was more likely to meet market demand. Even though private institutions in this area charged higher tuition than other regions of China, there was still a steady growth of student enrollment in these institutions. On the other hand, private

higher education raises the question of whether it actually increases the opportunities to attend colleges. Shen and Yan (2006) in a case study of private higher education institutions in Xi'an city located in central China found that students attending private colleges or universities usually came from higher-income families. Li and Morgan (2008) further indicated that low-income students faced obstacles in having access to private higher education institutions.

### ***Various Forms of Private Higher Education and Contextual Factors for Its Development***

Chinese private higher education institutions can be categorized into three types: the two-year or four-year colleges, independent colleges affiliated with a public university, and vocational or adult colleges. Four-year colleges and independent colleges are entitled to issue degree certificates, such as Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral degrees while vocational or adult colleges are only responsible for preparing students to meet market needs for certain skilled workers. Among the three types, the most unique one in Chinese higher education system is the independent college. Independent colleges are usually four-year private colleges that are formed through partnerships between public and private sectors (Zhang & Adamson, 2011). For example, Zhejiang University City College (in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province) was one of such colleges created with collaborations among Zhejiang University, Hangzhou municipal government, and Zhejiang Telecom Industry Corporation.

Independent colleges are non-public in nature but have some connections with public university partners and are subject to government monitoring. Since the first independent college was established in the 1990s, China has seen a tremendous growth of

such colleges. As of 2017, there were nearly 300 independent colleges across the country. This type of non-public institution is viewed as another means to fulfill growing demand for higher education. Some researchers called it a hybrid model as it combines public and private element in founding and operating an institution and reflects a way different from other country's approaches to higher education expansion (Liu, 2014; Zhang, 2015). This public-private partnership involving university, business, and government is an early attempt made by the Chinese government in exploring new ways of expanding higher education.

Zhang and Adamson (2011) discussed a variety of contextual factors that influenced the formation of independent colleges. They suggested that political, social, economic, and cultural forces altogether contribute to the emergence of independent colleges. In the political context, the process of decentralization that entails shifting more power from the central government to provincial and local governments has influenced reform of higher education. Zha (2011) agreed with Zhang and Adamson's argument as he summarized some main points from *The 1993 Outline for Educational Reform and Development in China*, which include the decentralization of the administrative structure and a diversification of funding sources for higher education institutions.

In social and economic contexts, the rationale behind the private higher education is more pressing. Zhang and Adamson (2011) listed three reasons for the reappearance of private higher education and creation of independent colleges in China, which include limited resources in public institutions with financial constraints in government, the increasing complexity of job market and requirement for skilled and educated workers, and the opportunity offered by independent colleges to match undergraduate programs to

labor markets. Su (2012) was more straightforward and pinpointed the effect of China's "one child" policy on higher education reform. Also, due to the Cultural Revolution, the generation born within the years of the 1950s lost chances to receive higher education. Together the two events in effect produced a more urgent need for parents of this generation to send children to higher education institutions. The last factor in terms of the cultural context is embedded in Confucianism that has shaped Chinese society for thousands of years and in which education is highly valued.

However, more concerns are centered on the quality of education in private institutions. Some institutions pay too much attention to school expansion and make little effort to improve student academic performance. Some institutions issue diplomas or certificates without central government or local government authorization. On the other hand, private institutions are always caught in a situation competing with each other for students, faculty, and funding support, let alone the threat from public institutions (Lei, 2012).

## **2.2 Access and Equity in Higher Education**

In China, the discussion of higher education access and equity always involve two concerns. One is the national college entrance examination that is still considered an effective means to maintain steady growth and relative equity of higher education that can ensure qualified students are able to receive college education. The other one is regional disparities that play in the distribution of higher education resources and university access (Qian & Smyth, 2011; Wei, 2009).

### ***The National College Entrance Examination***

The national college entrance examination is an academic qualification test

administered every year across China. Almost all high school graduates take the exam at the end of their last year in high school with a hope to qualify for undergraduate education. So far, this exam is still a prerequisite for entrance into various forms of higher education institutions. This exam is competitive and constitutes an essential part of applications for higher education institutions given scarce seats in extant higher education institutions (Bai et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2014).

A quick overview of the latest statistics shows that in 2017 among a total of 9.4 million exam takers, 7 million were admitted into higher education institutions, hitting an acceptance rate of 74%. However, the number of people who attended first-tier colleges or universities was 3.72 million, accounting for 39.5% of all exam takers (GFU, 2017).

The national college entrance examination first appeared in 1952, shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China. After its suspensions in the 1960s and early 1970s, the exam was restored in the late 1970s. Now in every June, millions of high school senior students take part in the national examination. Having a high school diploma or equivalent is a prerequisite for exam registration. The average age to take this exam is 18 although the age restriction was removed in 2001 (Davey et al., 2007). The exam tests knowledge learned throughout high school years including subjects such as Chinese, mathematics, English, physics, chemistry, biology, politics, history, and geography. Students are not required to sit in all subject tests. Except for three mandatory subject tests in Chinese, mathematics, and English, applicants who wish to major in science, mathematics, engineering, medical science, or the like usually take one to three science subject tests, and applicants who follow the humanity track take one to three of the other subject tests. The detailed requirement for subject tests varies from province to

province. The Ministry of Education is the administrative agency for the exam. Education department in each province is responsible for collaborating and observing the rules set by the Ministry of Education (Yang, 2014).

The national college entrance examination means a lot to Chinese parents and students. For most Chinese, especially those from less privileged background, this exam provides the only means to have access to higher education. Liang and his colleagues conducted a longitudinal study of Peking University (the nation's premier public university) and Suzhou University from 1952 through 2002 concerning the class origin of students and found that both universities had more than 30-40% students coming from rural or working-class families (Liang et al., 2012). It means this exam is still somewhat effective in helping underprivileged students receive higher education.

Because of its decisive role in a student's pursuit of higher education, the national college entrance examination has attracted a great deal of social attention in China. Chinese parents would like to contribute their social and financial capital to helping students succeed in the exam (Lai et al., 2016). Although high schools usually prepare students for the exam in senior year, private tutoring is popular in China's urban areas and economically developed regions. Chinese parents may choose to spend less in what they deem unnecessary items such as travelling or entertaining and spend more in preparing children for the exam.

### ***Regional Disparity in College Access***

Regional disparity in economy also influences higher education access. And the rural-urban divide in China makes it worse. The highly developed region in the east has more higher education resources than remote and less developed regions in the west.



Most of top-ranked universities are located in developed regions such as coastal provinces where there is a greater population density (see Figure 1). These universities enjoy a high concentration of government funding and policy support. Wei (2009) found that rural and poor students would be more likely to choose low-tuition low-fee institutions built in less developed regions as opposed to rich students who usually enter high-tuition institutions located in municipalities or coastal provinces. Qian and Smyth (2011) in their studies about 32 cities across China in 2003 found that urban wealthy households that live in a coastal area are more likely to send their children to overseas for study. It seems that urban wealthy families have more choices when they decide which school for their children to attend.



Figure 1: Population density of China

### **2.3 University Choice in China**

In China, factors such as high school rankings and education context, family socioeconomic status, and family expectations can affect student's choice of universities.

Senior secondary education (grade 10 to grade 12) in China is not compulsory and entrance into senior secondary schools (high schools) also is based on examinations. High score students are able to attend schools with high rankings. Low score students have fewer options other than attending poor quality high schools or vocational or technical high schools. The quality of high schools is measured largely by the number of students the schools can send off to colleges (Park et al., 2015). In the city Shanghai alone, among 248 public high schools, 19 schools were reported to have a college acceptance rate of 80% or above in 2017 and were considered best schools in the city ("Ranking of Shanghai Key High Schools", 2017).

#### ***College Decision***

Chinese parents hope that their children are able to attend a good quality high school so as to have higher chances of being admitted into colleges or universities. However, competition for good colleges and universities is fierce. Tutoring is one of the means that many parents and students rely on other than attending a very good high school. A report by the Chinese Society of Education in 2016 reveals that about 70% of elementary and secondary school students enrolled in various types of extracurricular tutoring schools in order to prepare for the college (China Daily, 2016). Li (2016) examined a number of factors that influenced student's performance in the national college entrance examination and found that tutoring was one of the influential factors.

However, students who chose to study at extracurricular tutoring schools were those who were not top 20% in class nor from poor families (Li, 2016). It means tutoring is a way to help low-performing students from affluent or middle-class families to get into college.

Many scholars pointed to the fact that in China the socioeconomic status has a close relationship with student's choice of universities, especially the elite universities (Fang, 2005; Lai et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2014; Veeck et al., 2003). That is, going to elite universities increases the likelihood of gaining access to networks and jobs that lead to social mobility. Therefore, simply qualifying for university entrance is not sufficient for many students. Instead, they and their parents strive for scores that offer potentials for top universities.

Lai (2016) argued that family backgrounds made a difference in higher education destinations. The influence of family's cultural capital, social capital, and financial capital on children's advancement to higher education is enormous in the decades since the late 1980s. Parents with college degrees are more likely to provide important financial resources and cultural capital for their children to compete for prestigious universities. Economic growth in China has widened the gap of family income. It is also more likely for wealthy families to send children to expensive universities or universities in the US or European countries. A study in 2009 shows that as many as 840,000 or 10% of high school graduates gave up the national college entrance examination that year and among them, 20% turned to choose overseas universities (Huang & Zheng, 2010).

Moreover, Chinese parents usually have high expectations of their children for academic achievement. In a study targeting middle-class parents and their expectation of children towards higher education, nearly 63% respondents hoped that their children

would be able to receive at least four-year college education and 23% parents preferred top-ranking universities (Zou et al., 2013). This is partially due to the Chinese traditional respect for education and partially echoes the increasing pressure from domestic job-seeking market. The Chinese culture embedded in Confucianism results in a value whereby education is highly valued and considered a family business (Huang & Gove, 2012). An individual's success is a family's success. In addition, Chinese parents become anxious about future competition in the job market. They thus cherish the hope that a good university education or overseas education can alleviate the anticipated pressure on their children and lead to a successful life (Bodycott & Lai, 2012).

#### **2.4 Chinese New Expectations of Higher Education**

China has one of the largest higher education systems in the world. As of 2016, China had more than 2,600 universities and colleges, enrolling over 26 million undergraduate students, five times the number reported by the Ministry of Education in 2000 (Ministry of Education, 2000, 2017b). The move to higher education expansion has pushed the Chinese government to seek more advancement in higher education. It requires higher education to serve not only as a supporting role for national economy and social development but also a leading player in world market. Therefore, Chinese higher education has shown a variety of pursuits on its own. It includes internationalization, marketization, privatization, decentralization, and diversification.

##### ***Internationalization***

Internationalization of higher education in China takes many forms. In 2007, there were more than 190,000 international students studying in China (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2008). China became the fifth popular destination country for international

students, following the US, the UK, France, and Germany (Hvistendahl, 2008). In 2018, the number reached over 490,000, showing a growth of nearly 160% in a decade (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2019).

Meanwhile, China sends more students to study abroad than any other nations. According to statistics released by UNESCO in 2006, China sent the largest number of international students abroad, accounting for 14% of the world's total (UNESCO, 2006). In 2019, a total of more than 0.7 million students studied internationally (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2020). The US, UK, Canada, and Australia are the top destination countries for Chinese students going abroad.

Many forms of international collaboration have generated in China. Some universities added international programs to their curricula, making them more attractive for foreign students. Some universities formed partnership with overseas universities. This kind of partnership resulted in the emergence and growth of Chinese overseas partnership universities (Guo & Guo, 2016; Rhoads et al., 2014). In addition to seeking partnership and setting up independent campus, some Chinese universities are also seeking collaboration with overseas universities to send students to study abroad for a year or two as exchange students. These collaborative degree programs have gained overwhelming growth in Chinese universities. The rise of internationalization has also provided the Chinese higher education the opportunity to seek cooperation outside of China. Some scholars (Guo & Guo, 2016) argued that the Confucius Institute in the United States and Canada is making China “more comprehensible and more marketable through orientalist tropes”.

### ***Marketization***

University education is no longer free in China. Since the mid-1990s, Chinese government has allowed colleges and universities to charge tuition and fees to students. The amount of tuition has seen increases year by year. This change affects which institution students can afford and fosters overall stratification in Chinese higher education.

The marketization includes privatization taking place in China as well. Higher education is no longer viewed as a public good to be provided by the state. The Chinese government relaxed its control over the public domain and engaged the private sector in public education, making these private institutions run largely on market principles (Mok, 2016).

### ***Decentralization***

Decentralization is a process that occurs throughout Chinese higher education reform. Mok (2005) and Zha (2011) described the approach in two ways: one is related to governmental reduction of funding to higher education institutions, the other is depicted as giving more decision-making power to institutions. The decentralization also makes it possible that the central government shifts financial burdens to provincial/local governments and institutions. In other words, decentralization gives a rise to the growth of private institutions in higher education.

### ***Diversification***

Diversification in the Chinese higher education context is more likely associated with the differences in institutional missions, academic programs, and the like (Zha, 2009). The decentralization of higher education administration is a process followed by diversification which occurs in a broader way. After the Chinese governments took

measures to assign more power to provincial and local governments and allowed the private sector to participate in higher education, there have been more forms of higher education coming into being in recent decades. Also, a diversification of higher education funding has developed alongside structural change in higher education system (Zha, 2009). This policy shift has driven more institutions to eagerly seek funding through collaboration with business or academic partners.

## **2.5 Cross-border Education**

Higher education institutions have recognized the role they can play as international actors in the global education market. Researchers are thus paying increasing attention to international collaboration in higher education and argue that with the various forms of cross-border higher education emerging in international market, more opportunities as well as challenges will be brought to higher education institutions around the world (Koehn, 2012; Lane, 2015; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2012; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012; Zhang, 2016).

### ***Variations in Transnational Education***

A variety of transnational education forms have emerged and gained substantial growth in past decades. The most prominent is the international branch campus, which has spread all over the world. Other than the form, the joint venture university, the joint and double degree program, and many other collaboration or partnerships across universities in different countries have taken shape and seen tremendous development in the context of education globalization.

**International Branch Campus (IBC).** International branch campuses are one of the most common and earliest forms in international collaboration in higher education. It

refers to “an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; and provides an entire academic program, substantially on site, leading to a degree awarded by the foreign education provider” (Garrett et al., 2016, p. 6). The Observatory on Borderless Education (OBHE) in England publishes a report on international branch campus every few years (Garrett et al., 2016). In its latest report released in 2016, it gives a full description of IBCs and recent development in every country. According to the report, there were approximately 249 IBCs by the end of 2015. The top five sending countries are the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, France, and Australia. They account for 73% of all IBCs, in which half are operated by US and UK institutions. By comparison, the top five host countries are China, the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Malaysia, and Qatar, operating 39% of the world’s total IBCs. It is noteworthy that China has overtaken UAE as the largest country since 2015 and has become a major player in IBC market. Another notable trend is that developing countries have “become both home and host of IBCs”. Though in terms of numbers, IBCs is not the biggest one in cross-border higher education, it remains the most vibrant among various forms of international higher education.

IBCs keep growing in recent years and seem to fill a void in addition to other forms of higher education collaboration internationally. The reasons for its existence and growth are due to a wide range of advantages to host country’s students and economy. IBCs allow students to access foreign higher education institutions from home country, avoid financial expenses associated with studying abroad, remain in a familiar culture and close to family. Other advantages may be associated with religion, personal safety, and working life. In order to meet local market needs, most IBCs offer programs catering



to local economy. Professional programs specialized in business, finance, banking, computer science and the like are among the offerings of most institutions. In contrast, programs like liberal arts are less favored among IBCs. While researchers have concerns about quality of IBCs as compared to home institutions (Edwards et al., 2010; Huang, 2007), Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2012) found that branch campuses of Australian, UK and US institutions have generally achieved desired results according to recent reports. Stakeholders of an IBC can expect a well-established campus other than home campus for those western countries' institutions.

However, there have been debates over whether or not IBCs bring more benefits than challenges to both home and host countries. Lane (2015) argues that the basic idea to establish a branch campus is to replicate the home country's curriculum and campus. Although not in direct link to home country's government, IBC is considered a cultural diffusion from home country to host country. Chiang (2012) expresses similar concern that import-export model in transnational higher education is like "Trojan Horse" which might deepen the impact of western culture in east Asian countries. Chiang's argument echoes what Carnoy discussed decades ago in regard to the influence of western schooling in developing countries. Carnoy (1974) described with empirical evidences from case studies of British in India, French and British in West Africa, and European settlers in Latin America and argued that western education in colonies served to meet the needs of capitalist interests and influenced the change of Third World societies. However, not every institution in exporting countries welcomes the idea of opening branch campus abroad. Hodges (2005) discussed the reluctance of some western institutions about setting up campus in east Asian countries. These institutions believed that opening a foreign

branch campus is detrimental to home campus and students as it would take some resources, faculty, and staff away from home institutions.

Given this debate, this dissertation explores reasons institutions in this study chose to open a campus in China and what initiatives they have despite foreseeable risks in the international collaboration.

**Joint Venture University Model.** An international joint venture university is another form of collaboration among higher education institutions when an institution is considering setting up a foreign campus. A joint venture university is different from international branch campus in that it is an independent higher education institution founded through collaboration between foreign higher education institution and host country institution or government (Knight, 2017). This form of higher education collaboration is the focus of this dissertation and the following discussion of institutions falls into this category.

There exist different models of joint venture institutions with regard to partners, funding arrangement, or mode of collaboration (Knight, 2017). The Singapore University of Technology and Design, for example, is co-founded by three partners including Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Zhejiang University, and the Singapore Management University. China pursues a different approach. It issued a regulation in 2003 titled *Regulations on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* which made it clear that a joint venture university must have an overseas university partner and a Chinese public university as a local partner (Hayhoe & Pan, 2015; Ozturgut, 2015).

It is noteworthy that the presence of the host country government is evident in this form of education collaboration. In the Chinese model, local city government as co-

partner of a joint venture university, is always providing land, buildings, and facilities for free. Hayhoe and Pan (2015) cited Shenzhen, the southern city next to Hong Kong, as a high-profile city in its efforts to attract well-developed institutions from abroad. The city government has designated a new urban district as a university city and invited institutions such as Tsinghua University partnering with the University of California, Berkeley, Beijing Institute of Technology with Moscow State University, Jilin University with the University of Queensland, to explore possibilities in this area.

As the joint venture university becomes a controversial topic in China, scholars began to take special interest in students who choose to enroll at those institutions (Onsman, 2013; Ozturgut, 2015). Ozturgut (2015) identified these Chinese students as low-score earners in the National College Entrance Examination but “possessing strong financial resources”. Joint venture universities serve as an alternative for them to seek better quality higher education than their test scores otherwise would permit. Onsman (2013), on the other hand, turned attention to international students at these institutions. He examined factors that drive foreign students to come to China’s joint ventures. His analysis points out that an overseas degree, the experience in China, and quality of courses offered are three primary factors that underlie the choice of international students. Thus, the student bodies of joint venture universities are composed of an amalgam of different types of students: Chinese citizens whose college test scores are unimpressive but who have financial resources, and international students who speak English, have resources, and seek an education from a Chinese university,

**Joint/double Degree Programs and Micro-campus.** Another popular form of collaboration among higher education institutions is a joint or double degree program, of

which the most popular form is double degree academic program (Lane, 2015). Double degree programs mean that both participating institutions have absolute control over courses offered whereas joint degree programs require participating institutions to share a degree from the offered program. In addition to joint/double degree programs, micro campuses (Castiello-Gutierrez et al., 2018) bring more flexibility and dynamics to transnational higher education. Micro campuses are a blend of international branch campus and joint venture operation. They enjoy shared campus, shared students, and shared tuition. In other words, it is a hybrid form in the current development of transnational higher education.

### ***Chinese Perspective***

There have been some investigations, though preliminary, on motivations of the Chinese government and institutions attracting overseas institutions to China. Research suggests that a range of formal intended factors including education diversity, enhancement of research and academic capabilities, more access to higher education, increase of regional profile, and the improvement of education competitiveness, have contributed to this phenomenon (Hayhoe & Pan, 2015; Huang, 2007; Montgomery, 2016; Weston, 2015; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2012; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012; Zha, 2011; Zhang, 2016).

According to *Regulations on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* released in 2003, a key reason for encouraging transnational education in China is to see what benefits or lessons the various forms of transnational higher education can bring to Chinese education system (Weston, 2015; Zha, 2011). The original idea was to have an experiment zone with which partnership universities set a model for public universities in

China (Zha, 2011). Another thought was to benefit local partner institution to improve its teaching and research capability through collaboration with a highly regarded western university. Weston (2015, p. 30) described how the “Chinese government was interested in elements such as systematic oversight from UK institutions, the liberal arts and extracurricular activities from US institutions, and planned on adapting such concepts for the Chinese context so as to create more innovative, but still patriotic, citizens or graduates.”

For local cities that host transnational education schools or programs, economic competitiveness is another concern. They believe that higher education can boost a region’s economic competitiveness. That is why some local city governments such as Kunshan and Suzhou city invested heavily in building campuses for importing institutions.

Another contributing factor is the benefits to the overall higher education market in China. Wilkins and Huisman (2012) indicated that cross-border education would be driving more competition among higher education institutions in local market and thus improving the host country’s education quality. Huang (2007) found that alongside other Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, China has seen increased enrollment by the introduction of foreign higher education. Transnational education activities in China provide more access to higher education and even more access to international higher education at home for a much larger population (Montgomery, 2016).

### ***Overseas Partners’ Rationales***

However, sending countries such as the US and UK have different rationales for entering international partnerships with Chinese higher education. They may give priority

to economic reasons such as generation of revenue, followed by reputation, branding, and research collaboration.

Revenue tends to be a primary concern for setting up a foreign campus as a research group on cross-border education interviewed many institution leaders (Garrett et al., 2016). Financially, a majority of partnership universities or programs are built on the funding support from host countries through either private or public channels. Qatar and Singapore both provided significant subsidies to institutions opening campuses within the countries. However, financial risks in running up a foreign campus are also high. Restrictions on money flow from some host countries and the possibility of reducing subsidies from host governments tend to make foreign campuses less likely to be big money makers.

A second consideration of opening campuses abroad is that international campuses are viewed as a means to enhance global reputation and create a world-class brand (Brassington, 2013). Elite universities such as New York University, which already has international reputation may consider cross-border education an extension of their global recognition. Less well-known universities such as Virginia Commonwealth University could benefit from promoting their brands globally and learning to be an international player.

Third, a foreign campus may facilitate home students and faculty connecting with another part of the world and taking advantage of foreign resources in terms of learning and research (Crist, 2017). By doing so, it will be easier for institutions to foster an international research team.

Another interesting factor involving participation of some very good universities

in setting up a foreign campus is a personal or institutional connection with host country. A school or an alumnus previously located in a host country may lead to movement of the foreign campus to this country. The Chinese “baby” of Nottingham University, which was established through the partnership formed between a Chinese university and University of Nottingham, is an example of this relationship (Garret et al., 2016).

Perhaps the most significant rationale lies in the fact that exporting countries are able to expand “soft power” by establishing a campus in another country. It means a country’s political and cultural values are to spread by means of educational collaboration. Carnoy (1974) implied imperialism decades ago. Knight (2017) has suggested geo-political relations in this regard. Chiang (2012) presents a particular argument about this education attempt.

## **2.6 Social Positional Theory**

To this point, the literature review has concentrated on organizational actors. It now addresses the actions of students and parents as they navigate the organizations in contemporary China. This dissertation draws on the work of Raymond Boudon about educational opportunities, which will enable a deeper understanding of the structural change in the form of higher education in China. Boudon pointed out in his positional theory that primary and secondary effects are those that help shape class differentials in educational attainment (Boudon, 1974). A primary effect can be expressed via a child’s family background and his or her aptitude at school. Secondary effects are those that are determined by educational choices made by children within the available range of education structures. In other words, the secondary effect allows more room for the existing education system to influence students’ educational achievement. Boudon argued

that educational choices made by children from differing class backgrounds could ultimately lead to differing education attainment and thus reinforce social reproduction that is affected by primary effects.

There has been abundant evidence in prior research supporting Boudon's argument with respect to the context of European and US education. Children from more advantaged social classes are more likely to make education decisions favorable to retaining their advantages than children from less advantaged social class. Jackson and his research group examined factors that may influence students' transition from secondary education to higher education and found that working-class students were less likely to make ambitious educational choices even when they performed well in examinations (Jackson et al., 2007). They concluded that class cultures tended to restrict less advantaged students from going beyond certain constraints and making ambitious choices even when they had a chance for a change. Thompson and Simmons (2013), in their study, further indicated that systemic change in English post-compulsory education did not necessarily lead to less inequality in education access but intensified the relationship between educational choice and social reproduction. Students from less privileged class were more likely to pursue vocational training or seek jobs upon graduation from secondary schools. The above two studies suggest that secondary effects along with primary effects account for why students from different social backgrounds tend to achieve differently. However, a few researchers argued that primary effects are the most important for children from less privileged backgrounds (Boado, 2011; Nash, 2003). They paid much attention to the importance of social backgrounds and its effect on student's education attainment but neglected the changing landscape of education



around the world, whether or not the change has any impact on student's choice of education and to what extent the choice affects ultimate education achievement and social mobility.

Liu (2017), nonetheless, attempted to utilize Boudon's positional theory to investigate how Chinese students make educational choices and achieve their desired goals in the context of continuous changes in Chinese higher education system. She suggested that "students from privileged backgrounds and metropolitan areas are more likely to achieve both the institution and fields of study of their choice" (Liu, 2017, p. 125). Social backgrounds and geographical origins were two determining factors influencing students' choice of study in higher education as well as obtaining of higher education degrees. She concluded that Boudon's positional theory has empirical implications for understanding the "growing complexities of choices" associated with higher education expansion in China.

Education expansion is one of Boudon's emphases in examining the relationship between education opportunities and social mobility. Boudon (1974) argued that an increase in education access does not necessarily mean an increase in social mobility. Education expansion may benefit people from underprivileged backgrounds, but it will also lead to more competitions among participants at all levels in labor market. Moreover, education stratification and diversification that have been taking place in many countries make us aware that people are facing more education opportunities than before and therefore are expected to experience more interplays between educational choices and educational destinations. The public, private and joint venture institutions that have emerged and boomed in recent China can exemplify the involvement of higher education

expansion, stratification, and diversification.

Another relevant point derived from Boudon's positional theory is that students from different social backgrounds make choices according to their positions in social stratification system of their society. More privileged students tend to overestimate and aspire for highest level of education while less privileged students choose to underestimate and leave before entering higher level of education. Influenced by the scenario, secondary effects seem to be more pronounced in obtaining higher level education (Jackson et al., 2007).

Furthermore, higher education has been increasingly stratified and puts more pressure on national governments to distribute resources to elite universities that compete well in international market (Liu, 2017; Wu, 2017; Yeung, 2013). Consequently, the hierarchy of higher education institutions in many countries has widened disparity among different types of universities. The increasing stratification affects students who make choices of which types of institutions to attend. In China, top-ranking universities including universities in projects 985 and 211 accounted for only 5% of the total number of higher education institutions (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2005, 2006). Liu (2017) suggests that students from privileged backgrounds are more risk-taking than those from working-class or agricultural families in China. This echoes Yeung's finding in a study that Chinese students from more socioeconomically advantageous families are more likely to obtain more and higher quality education than others (Yeung, 2013).

However, few studies have examined the relevance of Boudon's assumption to Chinese higher education changes and the issues discussed later in this study. Boudon's positional theory will thus guide this dissertation's analysis of every element involved in

the changing process in Chinese higher education related to the emergence of university partnerships in order to uncover inner relationships and their consequences. In these ways, the study examines to what extent the changes in Chinese higher education have impacted the inequality in educational opportunities in China.

## **2.7 Optimal Distinctiveness**

Optimal distinctiveness in organizational identity is another theoretical framework informing this dissertation. The concept of optimal distinctiveness in organizational identity focuses on how the institutional structure of joint venture universities shaped the identity and met the needs of stakeholders, primarily the students and their parents represented who chose to enter this type of university.

There is a growing interest in institutional pursuit of optimal distinctiveness in identity formation. Previous studies on optimal distinctiveness argued that conformity and differentiation are two seemingly contradictory but compatible constituents in organizations' pursuit of optimal distinctiveness (Durand & Kremp, 2016; Hsu & Hannan, 2005; Zhao et al., 2016). On the one hand, institutions tend to be similar to one another in order to gain legitimacy among peers; on the other hand, they strive to be different so as to be able to stand out in competition with others. Seeber and his colleagues examined the factors that contributed to identity formation of UK universities through mission statements and found that while universities chose values that were accepted within organizational community, they aimed to distinguish from peers in the same geographical location in order to be more competitive (Seeber et al., 2019). Likewise, Durand and Kremp (2016) in their studies about major US symphony orchestras between 1879 and 1969 argued that middle-status orchestras were more likely

to align with conventional choices in concert programming than their low- and high-status peers. This alignment not only helped orchestras maintain conformity with the known and recognizable features for this field or industry but differentiated them from peers by emphasizing the conventionality which referred to more choices of canonical composers. However, few studies so far have paid attention to the identity formation mechanism that shaped Chinese higher education institutions, especially the new form of joint venture universities this study investigates. How and why these institutions call them distinct or unique in current China education system is worth exploration from the perspective of both conformity and differentiation.

Another significant issue addressed by the theory of optimal distinctiveness is the relationship between organizations and individuals, or audiences which refer to the homogenous groups of individuals with a control over resources that can affect the success or failure of an organization (Hsu & Hannan, 2005). Audiences include internal audiences and external audiences. While internal audiences demand more conformity, external audiences give more attention to differentiation (Zuckerman, 2016). There has been a large literature on the approach of different audiences and the interaction and intertwined roles of internal and external audiences in shaping organizational identity. For example, Conger and colleagues argued that internal audiences such as entrepreneurs themselves might shape the optimal distinctiveness with their own expectations which may balance with evaluations driven by external audiences (Conger et al., 2018). Different from the argument on internal audiences, Rao and his research team found that external audiences played a bigger role when they examined the factors that affected the preference of nouvelle cuisine in French restaurants. They found that gastronomic

journalists as external audience significantly influenced the chef's choice of dishes for menu design (Rao et al., 2003). However, there is not adequate research on Chinese higher education in terms of the dynamics between institutions and stakeholders in this identity formation.

The relationship between new entrants and established ventures is also notable in the discussion of identity formation. New ventures seem to be more likely to pursue optimal distinctiveness than older, more established ventures, which may have key implications for examination of the new joint venture education form in this study. Zhao and colleagues investigated the US video game market and found that new entrants appeared to be more favorable to conformity as it was positively associated with sales (Zhao et al., 2018). When new ventures achieved growth in the market, a moderate level of differentiation became desirable for further development. Similarly, in a study regarding new and existing organizations in the US healthcare sector from 1965-1994, the development of identities for emerging forms was associated with their positioning in the organizational community with respect to identities of existing forms (Ruef, 2000). Since new ventures are more likely to seek identities that are consistent with the existing identities of established forms, Snihur (2016) went further to explore the identity building process of new ventures. Her study demonstrated that innovating ventures attempted to achieve optimal distinctiveness by developing uniqueness that was embedded in existing market categories. The integration of conformity and differentiation in the process of identity formation was salient for new organization forms.

In addition, Padgett and Ansell (1993) proposed the notion of “robust action” in discussion of multiple roles and its appeal to different audiences in identity seeking

process by the Medici family in Renaissance Italy. In later studies, Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) examined small specialty brewers and big brewers in the US beer brewing industry. They concluded that the trend of acquiring small brewers by large brewing firms was to meet the needs of different customers in the market who preferred craftlike identity originated in specialty brewers. The development of robust identity in large brewers seemed to coincide with the way clients chose which brewery drinks were more preferable. Likewise, Zuckerman and colleagues examined the effect of typecasting in feature-film industry and found that simple and robust identities could mean differently for novice and veteran actors (Zuckerman et al., 2003). A simple identity may be necessary for a novice to gain recognition. But a complex or “robust” identity is more favorable for veteran actors who may hold great appeal to demands across domains. These arguments can be applicable to the discussion of niche with regard to joint venture universities in this globalized era.

## CHAPTER 3: DATA AND METHODS

The review of existing literature on joint venture universities indicates that prior research inadequately examines the factors influencing the formation of Chinese-overseas university collaborations designed specifically for opening this new type of university in China. Nor does the existing research examine their anticipated consequences. Given the changing landscape of higher education in China and around the world, an in-depth examination of these joint venture universities is needed to provide a better understanding of their emergence, growth, and niche in China's contemporary higher education market. Such research will shed light on policy making in higher education collaborations and globalization.

Based on the guiding research questions presented earlier, this dissertation's research design is a qualitative exploratory case study of nine joint venture institutions in China. The dissertation's data sources are documents (the nine universities' mission statements) and intensive interviews with self-selected key informants. Data analysis relies on triangulation of the findings from both content analysis and intensive interviews. The following sections provide an overview and detailed description of each method as used in this study.

### **3.1 Research Design**

This dissertation research is a qualitative exploratory case study involving both content analysis of school documents and in-depth interviews with people working or studying at joint venture universities. The qualitative exploratory case study design is appropriate for this study as it attempts to investigate a new form of higher education that has existed for only two decades. The nine institutions so far have not been studied

thoroughly, if at all. Qualitative research is more useful when the aim of the study is to look for detail, depth, and context of a phenomenon, which in this instance is a new type of university established through partnerships between a Chinese and an overseas university (Given, 2008). Participants in this study are able to relate their experiences and feelings about the growth of these institutions and describe their perspectives differently than other available sources (Schutt, 2001). Content analysis and intensive interviews are the two techniques this dissertation used to collect data. Content analysis of primary documents included mission statements of universities and other publicly released information. The content analysis results lay a foundation for analysis of other data collected such as interviews (Schutt, 2001). Interviews, on the other hand, help improve and consolidate the validity and reliability of data collected throughout this study (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018).

There are two units of analysis in this study: universities and individuals. Universities include all the nine Sino-foreign joint venture universities in China. Individuals refer to administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents, and all other stakeholders involved in the universities. While it is common to identify higher education institutions as the unit of analysis in this study, individuals who have been impacted by the existence of these institutions in China are also worthy of study because their college choice or career development occurred along with the emergence of these universities. The interrelationship and interaction of universities and individuals reflect a changing phenomenon in higher education, and in another way, reinforce the ongoing efforts to reform traditional education system and help shape the identities of both universities and individuals.



## 3.2 Samples

### *Institutions*

As of 2019 when this study began, China had nine institutions in the category of Sino-foreign joint venture universities. These institutions are special in features when compared to other higher education institutions in China. Even among various forms of joint venture programs or schools with foreign universities in China, they stand out as a unique one in terms of organizational structure and school operation. For example, they were established through the partnership of a Chinese public university and an overseas university that is either public or private nonprofit institution. They are independent universities and have their own campus, facilities, and administration. They are characterized by English instruction on campus, simultaneously awarding a Chinese and an overseas degree diploma, offering of study abroad for a year or two at overseas partner university, and higher than average tuition compared to Chinese traditional public universities.

The first institution of this type is Willow University, established in 2004 and the most recent is Oak University, which opened in 2016. The nine institutions constitute the entire population of joint venture universities, and all are investigated for this study.

Figure 2 shows the location of those institutions in China. Table 1 presents the information about joint venture universities in China.



Figure 2: Location of Chinese overseas joint venture universities in China

Table 1. Chinese Overseas Joint Venture Universities

Institution	Founded	Enrollment (Approximate)	Partner Institution	
			Chinese	Overseas
Willow University	2004	8,000	Citrus University	Magnolia University
Pine University	2005	6,000	Laurel University	Sapphire University
Cherry University	2006	18,000	Palm University	Ambarella University
Orchid University	2011	1,600	Tulip University	Poplar University
Olive University	2011	1,800	Woodland University	Lily University
Elm University	2013	1,000	Bayberry University	Cedar University
Rosemary University	2014	3,400	Sunflower University	Chestnut University
Dogwood University	2016	1,000	Redbud University	Ivory University
Oak University	2016	500	Camelia University	Balsa University

\*Enrollment data as of 2020.

A closer look at the time of founding of these institutions shows that there seems to have been two periods of time during which approval for these institutions occurred. From 2004 to 2006, three universities were approved successively by the Chinese Ministry of Education. They are the Willow University, Pine University, and Cherry University. These universities are the earliest form of joint ventures in the field of higher education collaboration. Following them was a five-year interval without any new

university coming into the pool. Then, beginning in 2011, the next six institutions including Orchid University and Elm University, were established consecutively through 2016.

All of the institutions are located in east and southeast coastal regions, the most affluent regions in China. Of the nine institutions, four are situated in Guangdong Province, two in Jiangsu Province, two in Zhejiang Province, and one in Shanghai City. Usually, these institutions are located near where their Chinese partner institutions are, such as Orchid University or the Rosemary University located in the same city as their Chinese partner institutions. However, four institutions are far from their home institutions that are located in inland China. The reasons for moving to coastal cities may be varied, but one thing is certain that economic prosperity and the abundant educational and social resources available in coastal areas made the coastal areas more appealing than inland or remote areas with relatively low resources for educational development.

Four countries and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China are foreign partners. Among the four countries, the United States takes the lead with three joint venture universities, followed by the United Kingdom with two, Russia, and Israel each with one. The other two universities are “babies” of Hong Kong partners. However, the two UK-partnered universities are the first two in this category. They set a baseline for followers, even though no other UK partner joined in the following years.

Enrollment at these universities varies largely ranging from 500 (Oak University) to up to 18,000 (Cherry University). Years of operation may be a leading factor

contributing to the difference in enrollment. The three oldest institutions all have 6,000 to 18,000 students in recent years. However, school type and the development plan to accommodate more students in the future to some extent determine how large the school will become. For example, Orchid University, Elm University, or Pine University has no intention to expand enrollment to more than 2,000 undergraduates so far as they are more concerned about their current quality improvement and reputation.

### ***Interviewees***

Interview participants in this study consist of self-selected administrators and students from institutions under study who were willing to be interviewed. They were invited to be interviewed based on the following criteria: working as senior administrators or studying as enrolled students at these institutions. These participants were recruited by snowball sampling. Using professional network of Chinese acquaintances who work in some of these institutions and their recommendations for some potential interviewees, the researcher generated a list of recommended prospective interviewees. The initial list included 24 names from six institutions in this study. The researcher contacted each one via email or WeChat or in person and asked their willingness to participate in this study. Of the 24 persons contacted, 16 agreed to be interviewed. Once they agreed to be interviewed, the researcher sent or showed them the letter of interview invitation explaining my study and the purpose of interview so that they could know about what the researcher was going to ask before the interview.

After the researcher obtained agreements with all potential participants, the

researcher arranged the time and place for interview or the way they preferred to be interviewed such as in-person or phone interview. The 16 participants included seven administrators and nine students. They came from four institutions of the total nine institutions under this study. Tables 2 and 3 provide detailed information of these participants. Nearly all contacts with interviewees were in Chinese including the interview protocol and the interviews themselves, except for one student who came from South Korea and preferred to use English as our communication language. Some of the interviews were conducted in China during several trips in the period of data collection, while others were conducted via the phone or internet.

Table 2. Demographics of Administrator Participants

Administrator Participant	Institution	Position
Davis	Cherry University	Acting director of university marketing and communications, Deputy director of Center for knowledge and information, Library director
Johnson	Elm University	Associate dean for strategic initiatives
Lewis	Orchid University	Chancellor
Miller	Pine University	President assistant
Moore	Pine University	Director of whole-person education office
Smith	Elm University	Senior director of strategic marketing and public relations
Walker	Elm University	President assistant

Table 3. Demographics of Student Participants

Student Participant	Gender	Institution	Year in College	Major	Country and Geographical Origin
Jones	Male	Cherry University	Senior	Computer science and technology	Southwest China
Jackson	Male	Cherry University	Senior	Computer science and technology	Eastern China
Kimberly	Female	Cherry University	Junior	Accounting	Central China
Anna	Female	Cherry University	Senior	English and communication studies	Northeast China
Lee	Male	Cherry University	Senior	Electrical and electronic engineering	South Korea
Wilson	Male	Cherry University	Senior	Electrical Engineering	Eastern China
James	Male	Cherry University	Senior	Computer science and technology	Northeast China
Carter	Male	Pine University	Senior	International journalism	Southern China
Lowry	Female	Pine University	Sophomore	Finance	Central China

The seven administrative participants came from four institutions—Cherry University, Pine University, Orchid University, and Elm University. Of them, four were males and three were females. The average age was mid-40s. The youngest one was in the 30s and the oldest one in the 60s. All of them were Chinese. None of them was hired from foreign countries or working as foreigners in China. They all served as senior-level

administrators in these institutions. Most of them worked for more than five years, with three participants reporting over 10 years. Two participants joined the universities from their Chinese home institutions where they had also served as senior-level administrators and had engaged in founding of the new universities.

Student participants were recruited from two institutions—Cherry University and Pine University. There are six males and three females. Students were Chinese except for an international student from South Korea. The student from South Korea was older than the other participants as he had served in the Korea army for two years and reenrolled in college after three years of work. These students were enrolled in majors such as computer science, engineering, business, and social sciences. At the time of the interview, seven students were seniors, one a junior, and one a sophomore.

While the sample is not representative of the full range of students at all joint venture universities, the 16 participants represent a perspective about these universities from school stakeholders. Their experiences, opinions, and expectations contribute to answers to research questions raised above for this study.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

The dissertation utilized multiple ways to collect data for this study. The two primary approaches are school documents, especially mission statements, and in-depth interviews with people from the investigated institutions. In addition, notes from school visits to several campuses and written materials such as brochures or posters, reports, or articles serve as additional data. Together, they help promote a more comprehensive



understanding of the joint venture institutions.

### ***Mission Statement and School Documents***

Mission statements are one of the major sources of documents used in this study. They are available from the website of each joint venture university. Of the nine universities, eight provided both Chinese and English versions of mission statement. Only one university, the Oak University which was formed through the partnership of a Russian university, published its mission statement in Russian instead of Chinese or English on its school website. The researcher then translated the mission statement from Russian to English with the help of an online translation tool and asked a friend who learned Russian in college to check the translation's accuracy. Then, the researcher gathered mission statements of all nine institutions from school websites, eight in English and Chinese, and one in Russian which was translated to English later.

The researcher tried to compare the Chinese and English versions of each institution to see whether there were variations in wording of the mission statement. It turned out that there were little inconsistencies between the Chinese and English versions. Only two universities had some slight differences between their Chinese and English versions. For example, in the mission statement of Orchid University, the names of both partner university were mentioned in English version but not in Chinese version. Another difference appeared in the mission statement of Willow University which changed the word "reputation" in Chinese to "impact" in English when talking about school reputation around the world. Overall, these changes made little difference to what

these universities intended to express in mission statements. Therefore, the researcher ultimately chose the English version of each institution for subsequent analysis as they were similar to Chinese versions and crafted by the institutions themselves. The only exception is that the Oak University which presented their mission statement only in Russian on their school website turned out to have no original English version crafted by the school itself. The researcher used the English translation instead to make the nine institutions consistent in the language of mission statements.

Other school documents include school magazines, brochures, posters, and news information such as blogs and electronic newsletters posted on school websites which serve as other sources of written text for this study. In addition, interviewees and some contacts gave me reports and articles regarding their school development that, in some cases, serves as supplementary data as well.

### ***Interviews***

From November 2017 to June 2019, the researcher conducted interviews with 16 participants consisting of seven senior administrators and nine students. The researcher travelled four times from the US to China to either conduct face-to-face interviews as required by some of the interviewees or to visit institutions that showed interest or had intentions to cooperate for this study. Although not every journey turned out to be productive in terms of interviewees, the four trips provided the researcher with further opportunities to access either more information and/or potential participants for this study.

An interview protocol was used as an instrument to collect data from interviewees. In addition to collecting informed consent, it contained a set of open-ended, semi-structured questions for administrators and another set of open-ended, semi-structured questions for students (see Appendices A and B). The open-ended, semi-structured questions allowed interviewees to share their experiences, views, attitudes, and feelings from their repertoire of possible responses without trying to meet the desire of interviewer (Miles, 2014). They also allowed interviewees to provide information in detail which not only helped clarify their responses but also led to some unexpected and insightful discoveries (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018).

The interview questions targeting administrators covered topics including participant's personal and professional history, involvement in the institution, views of mission statement, perceptions of the new form of education, school formation, school operation, faculty and students, school relationship with other universities, and school future. By comparison, the interview questions that aimed to elicit answers from students were focused on student's family background, college decision, prior knowledge of the school, views of mission statement, school experience, faculty and peer students, financial ability, academic performance, plans after graduation, and views of school future.

Pilot interviews were given to three administrators from Elm University in order to check the effectiveness of interview questions in soliciting adequate information from interviewees. Modifications to the interview questions were made thereafter, such as

eliminating sensitive words, in order to make interviewees feel comfortable in responding to my questions.

The length of interviews varied widely, with the shortest lasting 20 minutes and the longest more than two hours. On average, administrator participants appeared to have longer interview time than student participants. Ten of the sixteen participants were interviewed face-to-face at their chosen sites, either in their school office, or in school coffeeshop, classroom, or lounge. The remaining six participants chose to be interviewed via WeChat because they were not available for face-to-face interviews. Fifteen of the 16 participants chose to speak in Chinese, which was the native language of the interviewees and the researcher. Only the international student from South Korea chose to speak in English so as to facilitate communication with the researcher who is fluent in English. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Those conducted in Chinese were transcribed into Chinese verbatim and later translated into English. The English interview was transcribed as it was.

### ***Institution Visits and Further Efforts***

The researcher visited five institutions out of the nine under study. Those visits not only fulfilled a goal of trying to interview people in person but added additional evidence to the data obtained from school websites, media reports, or interviews. Some contacts showed the researcher around their campus and introduced her to some of their colleagues during the visit. Some contacts even invited her to dinner with them and their colleagues, occasions which provided the researcher with further opportunities to connect

with people working at these institutions and explore more ways to search for the appropriate participants in this study and in the meantime improved her understanding of this new form of education in China. However, due to time constraint and lack of preparation, some of the dinner guests did not participate in this study.

Additionally, the researcher attempted to enrich the list of participants by inviting more individuals through multiple ways but met with unanticipated obstacles. The first obstacle came from Elm University. After the researcher conducted pilot interviews with some of their administrators, she was informed of the school's IRB requirement. The researcher then submitted IRB request to the responsible office hoping to interview the professors she met during the visit to Elm University and some staff to whom she was introduced during a dinner. Unfortunately, her IRB request was declined. The reason given was that the university was still young compared to other Sino-foreign cooperative universities in this category and had not admitted the first undergraduate class until then. Gaining access to key informants remained problematic elsewhere as well. Following an interview with the chancellor of Orchid University, the researcher sent out invitation emails to deans and provost of this university when knowing that most of them came from the home institution in the US or from other foreign universities. However, only one person responded with polite rejection. The others simply ignored the emails.

The last unsuccessful attempt was a summer visit in 2019 to Summer University which hosted a national research center on joint venture universities in China. The following is an excerpt of the memo regarding that disappointing visit.

*In mid-June I returned to China from the US in order to conduct additional research for my dissertation. I intended to interview several people, visit a research center, and attend a conference on international collaboration of higher education in China. Prior to leaving the US, I contacted several individuals associated with the research center and the conference, including the Director of the Center on research about Chinese overseas cooperative education at Summer University (the Center) who agreed to be interviewed and scheduled an appointment with me for that purpose. Soon after arriving in Beijing, I flew to visit the Center. I was hoping that I would be able to gain access to more Sino-foreign cooperative institutions via the Center and meanwhile get a ticket to the conference concerning Chinese overseas higher education collaboration that would be held in late June in a southern province in China.*

*The meeting with the Director of the Center was scheduled on an afternoon. I had previously arranged the interview while I had been in the US. The Director knew that I was traveling for the purpose of talking with him. A few days before my trip to the Center, I contacted the Director of the Center again to confirm the upcoming meeting or talk which I think would most likely be. However, he told me that he would be unfortunately out of town for a conference and would not be able to meet me on schedule. He could, instead, arrange a colleague to meet me. I accepted the arrangement hoping that I could achieve the goals set for the trip despite the cancellation by the Center's Director.*

*I traveled to meet the Director's colleague who had agreed to meet with me in his*

*place. In the rainy afternoon, I met the young woman who was assigned by the Director in a big conference room. She introduced herself as an assistant professor at this Center. She and two students welcomed me and showed me to a seat just right across from them at a big conference table. I hesitated because it was a little far from them, made it uneasy to talk with them freely and comfortably. I headed and sat down. However, the distance made me uncomfortable throughout the meeting.*

*After some casual talk about the long trip I had taken from the US to China, we began to talk about my visit to the Center. I gave a brief introduction to the dissertation project I had been working on and said that I was eager to have their support for more information on this form of education and would like to exchange views with them on development of these universities. They responded and told me what the Center did on this form of education. They visited some universities as I had done but they did not do an overall research on these universities. The Center's research is not restricted only to this form of education. There are many other forms of higher education collaboration in China such as joint programs or schools. At that time, they were writing a research paper about university governance concerning these universities. Then we exchanged views on the project, and they responded to some questions I raised during the meeting...*

*Ultimately, I repeated my request to attend the upcoming conference. I sent my request to their Director prior to the meeting and did not receive clear response from him. The assistant professor smiled, "We know your request. But our space is limited. I am sorry for that." So, we ended the approximately one-hour meeting.*

*The experience at the Center did not give me access to either the interview with the Director as planned or the Conference as hoped. However, it provided other forms of information. It revealed that the Center did not make a lot of efforts in research on this form of education as I had expected. Also, the information they presented to me during the meeting was fragmented which suggested that there lacked a systematic study of this type of university in related academic field.*

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Data in this study consisted primarily of mission statements obtained from websites of the nine institutions under study and interview transcripts of 16 participants. The researcher used a mixed method of open coding and pattern coding for analysis of each type of data. Open coding is a way of breaking down qualitative data into pieces of information marked with appropriate labels so as to compare similarities and differences (Creswell, 2013). Open coding is also referred to as initial coding which creates a starting point for the researcher to explore further about the phenomenon under study (Saldana, 2016). Pattern coding, as a method of second cycle coding, is to group summaries into a smaller number of categories or patterns which help identify emergent themes (Miles et al, 2014; Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2016).

The researcher first used an open coding method to go through mission statements line by line with more attention given to the descriptive words embedded in each mission statement. More often than not, codes were tentative and provisional at this stage as the investigator went back and forth several times and reworded what had been written down



until she found nothing missing from the labels. The investigator then created a matrix laying out all codes in columns and their corresponding institutions in the rows to identify similarities as well as differentiations among them. Following the open coding, the researcher proceeded to pattern coding which allowed her to categorize the large number of codes into smaller number of categories based on common properties. The frequencies of certain words such as “model” were noted during the process and helped identify emergent themes from the data. As a result, the process yielded eight major categories which were then synthesized into five themes for the mission statements.

With a larger amount of more complex interview data, the investigator began the open coding first with the administrator transcripts and then advanced into pattern coding which yielded 12 categories and 30 sub-categories. Similarly, the student interview data resulted in 11 categories and 30 sub-categories. Memos created during the interviews either in or after the process facilitated interpretation of each interview transcript with open coding and pattern coding approaches. The researcher tried to avoid subjectivity in interpreting these data by sticking to the original goal of interview questions and their alignment with the research questions. By doing so, the researcher was able to compare the themes obtained from both administrator transcripts and student transcripts. While commonalities exist concerning the context of school founding and growth, more variations emerge across institutions and within each participant group. Details about these themes are presented in later discussion.

### **3.5 Triangulation**

The themes that arose from the qualitative interviews and content analysis of mission statements and documents were triangulated to reach findings. The first step was to collect mission statements of all institutions this study aimed to explore from the schools' official websites. The investigator then used open coding and pattern coding to identify preliminary themes arising from the mission statements. Based on the effort, the next step was to gather data from targeted groups of participants in this study to verify the validity of preliminary finding. It involved conducting interviews with two different groups of participants, namely the senior-level administrators working at these institutions and students enrolled as undergraduates. Different from the data derived from internet, interview data were only available when individuals participating in this study answered questions in person or via internet call. All answers were tape-recorded. The two groups of participants consisting of seven administrators and nine students in each provided extensive and detailed information from different perspectives. A comparison was then made between themes that were deducted from the interview and themes from mission statements to detect if there were any similarities or differences existing between the two sources of data.

In addition, documents that were accessible on university websites including annual reports, newsletters, speeches by school leaders were collected along with media reports by Chinese major newspapers and scholarly articles regarding this form of university. The additional information served as a reliability check on information

obtained from interviews and content analysis of mission statements to ensure the accuracy of research findings derived from the above-mentioned data.

### **3.6 Trustworthiness**

Several steps were taken to enhance the internal validity and reliability of the study. First, internal validity was enhanced by using triangulation of data collection method which allows for more than one method to collect data (Patton, 2015). For this study, it involves content analysis of school documents and intensive interviews. It helps validation of data from multiple sources and thus improve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Member check was also applied to improve the internal validity. Some of the interviewees helped check the transcripts of their interviews and provided feedback on the content. Another way to improve reliability of the data is translation check. As the study involves a large amount of translation from Chinese to English for those interview transcripts, it requires more consideration of the accuracy and consistency of data during the process. Two Chinese doctoral students in social sciences aided the researcher in reviewing the translation from Chinese to English whenever she completed a transcript from Chinese to English. One of them also checked the transcript in Chinese by listening to the record of the interview. Their reviews significantly improved the reliability of the interview data. The investigator tried to stay in touch with those interviewees through social media and email contact. She was able to send three of the interviewees follow-up questions to clarify some of their answers in previous interviews and solicit their explanations on some new issues occurring after

interviews. Their responses strengthened the reliability of data collected earlier for this study and provided further support to findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 4: THEMES FROM MISSION STATEMENTS

Five major themes emerged from the content analysis of the mission statements of nine institutions in this study. They are an international focus, a foothold in China, high quality college education, emphasis on liberal arts education, and forging a new education model. The first two themes illustrate what these institutions think of themselves with regard to organizational identity and images they want to communicate to stakeholders. The next two themes focus on the core mission of education service provided by these institutions and to some extent distinguish them from traditional public universities in China. The last theme highlights the value of these institutions and gives reasons for why they exist along with the higher education reform in China and globalization around the world. The five themes altogether suggest how these institutions view themselves and what they aim to become in the Chinese and global higher education markets.

Table 4. Themes from Mission Statements

	International focus	A foothold in China	High quality college education	Liberal arts education	Forging a new education model
Willow University	x	x			x
Pine University				x	x
Cherry University	x				x
Orchid University	x		x	x	x
Olive University			x		x
Elm University	x		x	x	
Rosemary University	x	x	x		
Dogwood University		x	x		
Oak University		x	x		

#### 4.1 International Focus

All institutions choose to highlight their international identity in their mission statements. No matter if it is related to a university partnership, education services, the origin of educational resources, student composition, faculty, or values and cultures shared by stakeholders in these institutions, each institution tended to emphasize that they are different from traditional universities. Words such as international, global, cross-cultural, or cross-border are used frequently in those mission statements.

The most common characteristic of internationalization of those institutions is the university partnership formed between China and the involving overseas countries. Most Institutions indicated that they are a form of joint venture universities between China and the investing countries. Willow University defined the joint venture as a new delivery model for higher education in China, which combines both British education style and Chinese elements. Elm University stated that they are “a premier Sino-US joint venture university” aiming to promote international collaboration. Orchid University clearly listed two parent universities from China and the US in its mission statement. Some other institutions included the names of their foreign partner universities or countries in mission statements so as to pinpoint their joint venture nature. Because foreign universities are not allowed to open a branch campus in China, a joint venture university with a Chinese university partner is the option for these foreign universities wishing to do so.

Teaching is the core section in mission statements and contains more international

elements than others for these institutions. It is easy to find such phrases as global citizen, international perspective, meeting global challenges, serving globally, cross-cultural skills and understanding in the mission statements. The words these institutions choose may be different, but they all convey a certain meaning to the public: they are preparing students to be a global citizen. To achieve the goal, these institutions offer a wide range of international education including curriculum blending Chinese and western cultures, the benefit of learning with world-class faculty, diverse student body with more international students, and above all the English instruction in classroom. Orchid University noted that English is “a language of international communication” and students would receive English instruction during their studies on campus. However, only Orchid University pinpointed the exclusive feature of these joint venture universities in China in mission statement, even though all others offer English instruction to students in practice.

Student bodies comprised of international students is another indicator of internationalization for these universities. US partner universities are more explicit about the proportion or presence of international students in missions. Orchid University pointed out that “half of the student body hail from China and half represent countries from around the world”. Olive University and Elm University are not so specific as to the percentage of students from overseas countries, but they both indicated in their mission statements that their students consist of international students who are part of the school’s target students. However, except for the three Sino-US universities, other institutions did



not write into their mission statements the presence of international students even though they recruit both Chinese and international students.

Faculty is another factor influencing the degree of internationalization of an institution. The two Sino-US joint ventures, Elm University and Orchid University, noted in their mission statements that they are equipped with world-class faculty which means their faculty enjoyed world renowned reputation in academics. Since the US home institutions of these two joint ventures are ranked higher than other foreign partner universities globally, they appear to be more able to provide world-class level input into the joint ventures, and therefore the institutions are more confident in touting their international faculty strength in mission statements.

Research and public services are the other two areas for these institutions to make commitment to serving global needs or the human world. Willow University combines the research goal with world-changing outcomes to improve human life and socio-economic development. Cherry University aims to become more involved in more research in areas that challenge the human world. Other universities, such as Orchid University and the Rosemary University, place emphasis on having a positive impact internationally through their public services.

It seems that the degree of internationalization depends largely on the power of their foreign partner universities which have claimed to bring international education resources to the new universities.

## 4.2 A Foothold in China

Nearly all institutions mention in mission statements that they are universities located in China where the school was founded and has developed. It is an indispensable part when the school is talking about its educational services, goals, and values. The words “China” or “Chinese” appeared multiple times in every mission statement of these institutions. In addition to simply classifying the university as a university in China, Willow University further explained that it offers an education not only based on the British style but also is “localized in the Chinese context”. Dogwood University, while emphasizing its foreign partner’s strength in entrepreneurship and innovation, added that it would leverage the strength with Chinese culture. So, the “Chinese context, Chinese culture, Chinese experiences, or Chinese tradition” highlighted by these institutions in their mission statements present a unanimity about the unique role these universities play in Chinese higher education system.

There are three ways to look at the roles for these institutions. First, even though these institutions are branded international universities when they are seeking market promotion, they are localized as Chinese universities as well. They need to follow the Chinese government requirement for university governance and operation. Also, they need to adapt to Chinese cultures when seeking development. Willow University and Dogwood University are examples of this awareness reflected in mission statements. For example, Dogwood University stated that they were an institution “leveraging the power of entrepreneurship and innovation with rich Chinese culture”. Second, these institutions

are expected to serve Chinese stakeholders first. To be specific, one of the purposes for establishing these universities was to improve Chinese higher education and address related concerns. This imperative includes serving the Chinese students first among all tasks. For example, Rosemary University made a commitment that they would serve the social needs and improve the well-beings of citizens of the local region, China and world community in that order. Third, the existence and growth of such universities are valuable to Chinese higher education, national economic growth, and bilateral relations between countries. In other words, this form of international collaboration in higher education not only serves educational purpose but is expected to have social, economic, and political impacts. Oak University is such an example. It takes these factors into consideration in its mission statement, which describes it as a university preparing qualified students for the development of a China-Russia strategic partnership while fulfilling educational and research needs in local region.

The inclusion of various Chinese elements in mission statements suggests that in addition to identifying themselves as international universities, these institutions stand firmly on the mission to serve and make contributions to Chinese society.

### **4.3 High Quality College Education**

School quality is the foundation for higher education institutions to seek sustainable growth in the education market. These joint venture universities are not an exception. High quality is very important for them to attract students and build reputations for future development. Words such as high quality, excellence, leading,

high-performing, or world-class are widely used in mission statements to reflect such an orientation.

High quality may refer to several aspects which include students, education, research, faculty, and the overall aim of the university. Three out of the nine universities that include Elm University, Rosemary University, and Dogwood University focus attention on teaching. Three universities set expectations for students, as evidenced in the missions of Orchid University, Olive University, and Oak University. Three universities aim to be world leading or first-class universities. Interestingly, the three universities that aim to be world leading have been established more recently among these joint ventures. Whereas none of the joint venture universities founded earlier in this category indicated in mission statements that they are dedicated to becoming top universities in the world. The growing emphasis on school reputation and ranking as depicted in missions over time might reflect a change in how the institutions' leadership hopes to position themselves in the higher education market either in China or internationally. The purpose of this type of university has changed slightly from earlier years to the recent decade. However, the overall pursuit of quality by these institutions is apparent in mission statements even though the approach may be different considering each institution's background and strength.

#### **4.4 Emphasis on Liberal Arts Education**

A salient feature of these joint venture universities is the offering of liberal arts education. Three institutions made it clear that they provide liberal arts education to

students throughout the four years in college. The three institutions are: Elm University, Orchid University, and Pine University. Elm University put more details into the mission regarding its liberal arts education and described it as a combination of multidisciplinary curriculum and an integration of Chinese and American academic excellence and experiences. Orchid University reaffirmed that students receive liberal arts education in humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and mathematics. Pine University further explained that the liberal arts education is linked to a new education model delivered by the university and is different from traditional Chinese universities.

Liberal arts education is originally embedded in western education. Its offering to students enrolled in these institutions made them distinctive from traditional universities in China. However, its introduction to China by these joint venture universities provides both opportunities and challenges to Chinese higher education. The opportunity lies in the availability of this education model to Chinese students and the ability to learn from it by Chinese traditional universities. The challenge comes from whether or not this education model is accepted by Chinese students and parents or Chinese counterparts and what adaptive approach should be taken to make it more suitable for growth in China. However, the emphasis on liberal arts education in missions shows that these institutions are prepared and confident that they can bring that change to Chinese higher education market.

#### **4.5 Forging a New Education Model**

Out of the nine institutions, four institutions mentioned the word “model” in their

mission statements. Their wording is very similar: a new model for higher education.

Pine University stated that the model is based on the introduction of liberal arts education to mainland China, while other institutions identified it as a model for Chinese and international higher education collaboration. Incidentally, the four institutions citing the new model for higher education in their mission statements are among the first batch of institutions that have been established since the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the approval of Sino-foreign cooperative universities in 2003. The consensus on value of the new model shared in mission statements suggest that these institutions did take an exploratory step toward this form of partnership at that time, just as Olive University noted in its mission that it would “serve as a model for other Chinese-American higher education initiatives”.

Following these pioneering joint venture universities, Elm University, Rosemary University, Oak University, and Dogwood University that were established more recently from 2013 to 2016 did not further mention the “model” in their mission statements. However, that does not mean that they do not think of their education in China is a new education model. Just as the president emeritus of Cedar University remarked in 2018 at an event held at Elm University, the new university was seeking a new education model that would draw on the best practices of existing universities and provide students with the best and most needed education. Therefore, even though the mentioning of model can be rarely seen in their mission statements of those institutions, it still functions as a guide for them in practice.

A new model also means uniqueness. Cherry University stressed that their school is unique in terms of focuses and features in mission statement. There might be nuanced differences in perception of the model by different institutions, but the implication behind it is similar. Uniqueness seems more appropriate if relating the model to either Chinese higher education reform or higher education collaboration or educational globalization across cultures. In fact, what they are looking for is an exceptional education that is different from others.

Overall, the five major themes that are derived from mission statements of these institutions present a full picture of how these institutions have been formed, what they seek to provide, and what they will attempt to achieve for the years ahead. This form of higher education has been operated in China for nearly two decades. The extent to which the missions have been achieved by these institutions needs to be addressed in further investigation. Whether the performance of these institutions is consistent with the missions they created and what change has occurred in the past will be examined further.

## CHAPTER 5: THEMES FROM ADMINISTRATORS

This chapter presents results from interviews with seven administrator participants from four institutions out of the nine in this study. The four institutions are Cherry University, Pine University, Orchid University, and Elm University. Administrators include individuals who had official positions at the joint venture universities. Two administrator interviewees had previously worked as president or senior administrator at their Chinese parent universities. In this study, interviewees' positions included chancellor, president assistant, director of administrative office, and associate dean. Participants were all Chinese administrators. The methods chapter above has described the difficulties the researcher faced in finding administrators who were willing to be interviewed. Consequently, the small self-selected sample is not representative of administrators at the nine campuses and their parent institutions. Nevertheless, certain themes emerged from the seven interviews.

Participants responded to questions regarding school formation and operation, school financing, students, school achievements and challenges, and school future addressed by the research questions which guided this study. As a result, their responses fell into 12 categories: formation of university partnership, motivations of overseas universities, rationale of Chinese universities, school financing, characteristics of students, characteristics of joint venture universities, role of overseas partner universities, role of Chinese partner universities, niche of the university, school achievements,



challenges, and school future. Table 5 presents summary of the themes and subthemes from the administrator interviews.

Table 5. Summary of Themes and Subthemes from Administrators

Categories	Themes
Formation of university partnership	<i>Intention to expand globally</i> <i>Chinese education policies</i> <i>Local government support</i> <i>Key persons</i>
Motivations of overseas universities	<i>School expansion/Global network</i> <i>Improvement of reputation</i>
Rationale of Chinese universities	<i>Internationalization</i> <i>Enhancement of academic and research capabilities</i> <i>Institutional development</i>
Financing	<i>Tuition</i> <i>Local government funding</i> <i>Overseas partner investment</i> <i>Little funding from Chinese partner universities</i>
Students	<i>Middle-class students</i> <i>More diverse students</i>
Characteristics of Joint Venture Universities	<i>Cross-cultural experience</i> <i>Award of overseas degrees</i> <i>Home access to overseas education</i>
Role of overseas partner	<i>Academic responsibility</i> <i>Quality control</i>
Role of Chinese partner	<i>Policy advisor</i> <i>Political guarantee</i>
Niche of the University	<i>A new model for higher education exploration in China</i> <i>Providing more seats for college seekers</i>
University achievements	<i>Enrollment increase</i> <i>More recognition</i>
University challenges	<i>Financing</i> <i>Conflicts</i>
School future	<i>Mixed with uncertainties</i>

### **5.1 Formation of University Partnership**

Participants discussed various factors contributing to emergence of this form of higher education in China. Of them, the most significant factors appeared to be globalization, Chinese education policies, local government support, and the influence of key persons who played an important role in the successful formation of these universities. The first three factors, in the eyes of participants, shaped the external environment that facilitated the formation of this kind of university partnership, while the last factor determined to a large extent how the two partner universities joined hands together to establish a new university in China.

#### ***Intention to expand globally***

It is evident that globalization is seen as having an increasing impact on higher education development in China. More and more universities have thought about expanding outside of their home countries to enhance competitiveness. Participants during interviews described this phenomenon as a driving force for their school's emergence, especially for their overseas counterparts who were eager to enter the Chinese market and acted as the most aggressive players in the formation of this special university partnership.

Participants from Sino-US joint venture universities emphasized the global strategies that their overseas partners took in view of this joint venture university. Lewis from Orchid University reflected on his first meeting with president of Poplar University. "They said, in the era of globalization, higher education should not be restricted to one

culture, it needs to embrace different cultures.” Johnson at Elm University described how their US partner perceived globalization, “I [Cedar University] should seize the opportunity of globalization...The university is young in history...So it is willing to try.” In the case of the two universities, the overseas universities initiated the partnership that involved Chinese partners later on. Leaders of Poplar University travelled to China several times and visited quite a number of higher education institutions in the city where they decided to settle down later. Similarly, the business school of Cedar University was the first school of that university that considered expansion into China as a global strategy. They visited several coastal cities in eastern and southeastern China before they set foot in the current city. Both cases showed that the US universities were the first actors in this kind of partnership who ambitiously planned to seek a foothold in China.

The other two institutions involved in interviews had similar stories when asked who initiated the partnership. Pine University which was formed between Hong Kong and inland China was born with the intention of its Hong Kong partner to enter inland China market. Miller from Pine University used a metaphor of a marriage to describe the relationship. Davis from Cherry University said that it was the UK institution that first showed interest for this type of partnership.

### ***Chinese Education Policies***

Education policy is another factor influencing the formation of these joint venture universities. There are two major policies participants cited frequently during interviews. One is the Regulations on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (the

Regulations) released in 2003, the other is the National Outline for Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) (the Outline) released in 2008.

Participants during interviews highlighted the two policies as foundations for establishment and operation of joint venture universities. While the first policy outlined necessary steps for joint venture universities to follow in terms of establishment and operation of this particular type of education form, the second one provided general guidelines for the collaboration between Chinese universities and foreign counterparts, and reinforced Chinese government's decision to open up to the world, which would benefit the overall Chinese education development. Lewis, the founding president of Orchid University, mentioned the Outline in particular:

In the meantime, the Outline was going to be released. So they [the Chinese Ministry of Education] really wanted to see the collaboration with Poplar University as a way to achieve the goal set by the Outline. They expected to establish a high-quality Sino-foreign cooperative university which would have a positive effect on Chinese higher education.

Davis from Cherry University stated that, “we thought the government policy emphasized the openness to outside world, education was part of it.” The Outline encouraged Chinese higher education institutions that were keen and ambitious to enter international market to cooperate with overseas partners and explore a new model of education collaboration.

By comparison, the Regulations provided more details on education collaboration with foreign partners in China. Moore from Pine University stated, “the founding and

operation of these joint venture institutions are based on the Regulations. It requires the involvement of a Chinese university and an overseas university.” Johnson at Elm University further explained, “it specifies the number of seats Chinese partners need to take in the board of directors or board of trustees. The seats should not be fewer than 50% in the board for Chinese partners.” Lewis described, “we have eight board members, four from China and four from the US.”

The national policies have driven Chinese universities to take action in the globalized market. Moore from Pine University said, “Because WTO required, when China joined WTO in 2001 as a new member, higher education must open to its member countries. Generally speaking, it [emergence of this type of university] was the consequence of globalization.” Davis from Cherry University emphasized that “education is a consumer good and needs to be more open.”

While more and more Chinese students chose to study abroad in recent years and China has become one of the top destination countries for foreign students, the emergence of these joint venture universities was inevitable in the context of higher education’s globalization. Miller from Pine University expressed concern about the growing number of students seeking to study in overseas countries: “We have to admit we are falling behind the international model to educate modern talents... We need a new model to advance Chinese education level.”

### ***Local Government Support***

Another factor that contributes to this partnership is support from local

government. Participants from three institutions during interviews highlighted the importance of government support in creating this form of collaboration. They indicated that local cities had heavy investments in these universities. These cities shared a similar goal, that is to improve local competitiveness by introducing world-class educational institutions which would in turn benefit local economy.

Lewis from Orchid University described the context of local government involvement: “The local government had long desired to attract a high-quality world class university to the city...They hoped a world-class [university] would help the city become one of the world’s attractive metropolitan areas...So our district said that they could provide land for free”. The involvement of city government and district government in Orchid University ultimately led to an agreement signed by four parties in which the local government and district government were included.

Similar to Orchid University, Elm University is another institution provided with considerable support from local government. Walker from Elm University recalled:

The local government had an aspiration, introducing a world class university to the city. It was so eager to bring innovation to the city. A higher education institution might be one of the innovations.

Other than Orchid University and Elm University, the other two universities participating in the interviews also received support from their local governments. For example, Davis indicated that the Industrial Zone located in their city provided free land and facilities for Cherry University on a lease term. Johnson said: “Nearly all Sino-

foreign joint venture universities have provincial or local government funding support”. This explains why participants showed reluctance to identify their institutions as private when asked how to compare them with other private institutions in China. However, they neither identified their schools as public. Lewis and Johnson defined their schools as institutions falling into a third category named “Sino-foreign cooperative education institutions”. Lewis described them as one of the three horse carriages: “public education, private education, and Sino-foreign cooperative education are three horse carriages...Public education is predominant...private education is complementary...Sino-foreign cooperative education is exploratory.” The existence of Sino-foreign cooperative universities means an exploration or experiment for higher education in China, as agreed by participants during interviews. Therefore, the involvement of government in this kind of collaboration was considered substantial, especially for relieving financial burden for new universities at earlier stages.

### ***Key Persons***

It is interesting to note that participants highlighted the importance of certain key persons in the founding process of universities in addition to external factors mentioned above. Key persons used their power to influence the decisions made by institutions that intended to join the partnership. Participants described them mostly as founding persons or support figures.

Founders of Cherry University are such persons in the eyes of participants. Davis from Cherry University stated: “You know many things, though it was an agreement

between two universities, it was initiated by people. [*Interviewer: who?*] People who are important in this matter.” Miller at Pine University emphasized the individual influence of their Chinese founder: “He engaged in drafting of the Regulations. So he knew the higher education system well...He had served as vice-president of Laurel University and later became an official in National People’s Congress (NPC)...Considering his [official] position, he also knew government well.”

Founders of these universities shared some characteristics in common. First, they knew Chinese higher education well. Thus, they deeply understood what the Chinese public expected from international education market. Second, they had personal ties with Chinese home institutions. For example, a founder of Cherry University was a Chinese serving as vice-president of Ambarella University while working at Palm University as visiting professor. These characteristics gave them privileges in connecting two universities together to create a new and independent “baby” university in China.

## **5.2 Motivations of Overseas University**

Participants were asked what motivated overseas universities to form this partnership. They recounted from past experiences why their foreign partners showed great interest in China. From their responses, school expansion and improvement of reputation are two primary reasons for this phenomenon.

### ***School Expansion/Global Network***

Participants during interviews stated that expansion was one of their foreign partners’ strategies motivating them to seek collaboration with China. Universities were



eager to make use of market resources in foreign countries to serve their home campus or to achieve further development across national boundaries.

Participants from the two US-based joint venture universities gave particular attention to this strategy in the interviews. They frequently cited “global network” or “globalization” to describe the benefits these joint venture universities could bring to overseas partners. Lewis from Orchid University stressed, “In the last 20 years or so, Poplar University made great efforts to create what they called ‘a global network university’...And China was considered one of the essential points in that network.” He still remembered that the president of Poplar University said, “higher education should have a global vision.” It is consistent with prior research on joint venture universities studies suggesting that globalization was one of the motivations for American universities to set up branch campuses in Asian or other developing countries (Brassington, 2013).

Johnson from Elm University shared similar stories when talking about why their US partner chose China as an entry to build global network: “It was the business school of Cedar University who first thought about expanding into China. Later they escalated the idea to leaders of Cedar University. They all agreed it was a good opportunity for Cedar University to meet its globalization expectation.” From Orchid University to Elm University, American universities stepped up their efforts to develop their global dimensions over past decades. China was one of their must-have points in the network, as asserted by participants from interviews. China’s booming economy was attractive to

American universities who were ambitious to develop a global university.

By comparison, Hong Kong universities were not as ambitious as their American counterparts, but they showed similar concerns about school development. Miller from Pine University said:

Hong Kong is too small...Inland China is a huge market...They wanted to either expand or improve the school's influence...But our goal was small. We just planned to recruit 2,000 students then.

In this way, Hong Kong universities made their ways into inland China market with small attempts which they thought were a trial for all Hong Kong universities, as evidenced by Miller in the interview:

The leaders of the Chinese Ministry of Education said they wanted to see the outcome of the first class of students at Pine University to determine next steps for other Hong Kong universities that had similar desire to open schools in inland China.

Apparently, universities in this study are active seekers in school expansion. They viewed it as an effective way to achieve whatever goals included in the expansion activities. The goals of improving the school's reputation and its research capacities were mentioned more by participants and will be discussed in the next sections.

### ***Improvement of Reputation***

Compared to the overall goal of building a global network, reputation is more related to the value of a university. Therefore, improving the reputation of their university

was viewed as another motive by participants.

For the two US-based institutions in this study, the reputation was reflected more by their joint venture universities which used the name of their US home institutions to promote themselves in the market. Smith who was responsible for brand management of the new university, echoed the sentiment, “Our job is to promote the brand in the long run. Despite the fact we are part of Cedar University, we are independent.” Johnson described it more directly: “Elm University is using the Cedar University brand and Cedar University structure.” They both agreed that Cedar University’s brand was very attractive to Chinese students who wanted to attend top universities in the US. Similarly, Lewis from Orchid University argued that Orchid University was, in practice, a branch campus of Poplar University system even though it was independent: “Poplar University viewed this university as a constituent of its global system, a campus of its global network.” Therefore, its reputation is part of Poplar University’s reputation.

Participants from the two Sino-US joint venture universities also explained why their US host institutions were interested in building their global reputation by setting up campuses in China. They made comparisons to the world’s most prestigious universities such as Harvard University or the University of Oxford. Johnson said, “Let’s assume Harvard University came to China and created a joint venture university here. They can hardly make that decision. They are so prestigious that they would not want to take that risk.” This statement echoes what Lewis shared in the interview regarding Poplar University’s interest in China:

The current president of Poplar University once served as president of the University of Oxford...He said Poplar University is not an Ivy League institution, so it is the least conservative...At Oxford, it is hard to imagine. Oxford professors believe they are the best. They would question why they venture outside to partner with others.

In the eyes of participants, Poplar University and Cedar University represent the universities that are less conservative in the US. These two universities are willing to take a risk to improve the school's reputation by stepping into global market and cooperating with interested countries and higher education institutions.

### **5.3 Rationale of Chinese Parent University**

Compared to their overseas counterparts, Chinese higher education institutions were more interested in improving their home campus by collaborating with foreign universities. Participants indicated that Chinese higher education institutions expected to achieve three major goals through this form of partnership. They are internationalization, enhancement of academic and research capabilities, and institutional development.

#### ***Internationalization***

Participants interviewed from the four institutions shared stories regarding institutional collaboration with their overseas counterparts. Lewis, who had served at two public universities in China and had close contact with Poplar University in earlier years, shared that:

At the end of 2001 while I was president of Spring University, a delegation from

Poplar University visited our institution. I said, “welcome and I hope you will establish Orchid University Center in our institution.” ... In January of 2003, I joined Tulip University and served as president. The first delegation I greeted was also from Poplar University. I spoke to them, “I hope you will build Poplar University Center at our institution. I will give you support.”

As a representative of Chinese higher education institutions, Lewis displayed what Chinese universities think of cooperation with foreign universities. They were eager to cooperate with world prestigious universities as a way to enhance their school’s academic competitiveness and reputation. Lewis further explained, “Tulip University is very much like Poplar University because it’s not in the category of Chinese top 10 universities but is still one of the best universities in China.” For Lewis, the two universities shared a global vision and craved for innovation as reputations as among the second-best universities in each country.

### ***Enhancement of Academic and Research Capabilities***

Another motivation that drives Chinese institutions is the enhancement of academic and research capabilities. Participants who were representatives of Chinese home institutions described how the university partnership affected their Chinese home institutions in terms of academic and research activities. Walker from Elm University provided an example of research collaboration carried out between its US and Chinese partners:

When faculty from Cedar University came to seek partners at Elm University,

especially in engineering science, it is very likely that they would cooperate with faculty from Bayberry University. So, this is a win-win, beneficial for Bayberry University and our institution as well.

Lewis, on the other hand, provided examples concerning students who benefited from this partnership, “our students can take their classes...Students have more communications and exchange activities due to this cooperation.”

The improvement of academic and research activities in turn escalated the level of internationalization for Chinese institutions. Walker was very positive towards university partnership in this regard: “through collaboration between two parent universities, we can see improvement in many aspects such as research or teaching. It increased the level of our internationalization.”

### ***Institutional Development***

A third factor that motivated Chinese universities to pursue international cooperation is the impact on school development. Participants mentioned that university partnership had overall impact on school development for Chinese universities.

Participants from Elm University drew attention to the strengths of American universities and their impact on Chinese higher education institutions, such as reform of school management, pedagogy, or teacher training. Miller from Pine University described university restructuring due to the appearance of new university which helped improve redistribution of school resources and maintenance of healthy development for the whole university: “There had been a branch campus opened by Laurel University alone in this

area, a large school that was not used well. Student enrollment was low. Then we came...we used their campus the first few years.” The joint venture universities in many ways affected universities in China and brought resources they expected from overseas partners. These resources helped Chinese universities strengthen academic basis, improve research capability, and optimize education resources.

#### **5.4 Financing**

Participants were asked to identify major sources for school funding. They described a variety of funding sources including tuition, endowments, research grants, overseas partner investments, and local funding support. Among them, three sources emerged as important. They are tuition, local funding support, and overseas partner investment. In addition, most participants stated that their Chinese partner universities did not play a role in the school funding efforts.

The share of each funding source varies among institutions depending on history and size of each institution according to participants. Pine University and Cherry University were the two institutions depending largely on tuition income. Orchid University and Elm University, on the other hand, relied heavily on funding from local governments. Pine University and Elm University claimed significant amount of money from their overseas partners.

#### ***Tuition***

Most participants acknowledged their tuition was the highest if compared to public universities in China. Johnson made it explicitly, “tuition at the nine joint venture

institutions is the highest in China.” Miller explained that the tuition was at similar level with that attending Hong Kong universities. Table 6 presents a summary of tuition at the nine institutions in this study for 2019-2020 academic year.

The average tuition of these institutions for Chinese undergraduate students was approximately 100,000 RMB a year, 20 times higher than an average of 5,000 RMB for attending a public university in China.

Table 6. Summary of Undergraduate Tuitions at Chinese Overseas Joint Venture Universities (2019-2020)

Institution	Tuition (in RMB)	Tuition (Equivalent US\$)
Willow University	100,000	14,200
Pine University	90,000	12,800
Cherry University	88,000	12,600
Olive University	65,000	9,300
Orchid University	120,000 (1st year and 2nd year)	17,000
	180,000 (3rd year and 4th year)	25,700
Elm University	180,000	25,700
Rosemary University	95,000	13,600
Oak University	40,000	5,700
Dogwood University	95,000	13,600

Sources: Institutions’ official websites (reported in Chinese currency)

Note: For Chinese undergraduate students only.

Many participants described tuition as an expected primary source for school funding. Participants from Pine University claimed that they had shifted from earlier dependence on investment by Hong Kong partner university to a preponderance of support by tuition income. Moore from Pine University reflected, “except for start-up time, Sapphire University no longer invested in our school. We are basically relying on



tuition income.” This statement was echoed by Miller who was serving at Pine University as well. “It is certainly tuition. We are completely relying on tuition income to get the school operated. So students are our ‘God’.” In addition to Pine University, Cherry University was considered another institution in successfully achieving a break-even point with tuition revenue. Lewis from Orchid University commented, the most successful point of Cherry University is their ability to break even. They may not need government support now. They can operate with tuition revenue and social service income. Meanwhile, he expressed hope that tuition could be one of major revenues for Orchid University in the future years.

### ***Local Government Funding***

Different from Pine University and Cherry University, participants from Elm University and Orchid University did not think of tuition as their primary funding source for the time being. Local government support was instead a significant funding source for the two universities. Smith from Elm University explained, “we rely on self-financing, primarily on funding from local government and Cedar University, and some social donations...Student tuition is small.” Johnson echoed the statement by describing that, “the first phase of campus construction, from 2013 to 2018, was funded by our local city. It includes land, buildings, equipment, all provided and funded by the city and free for our school use.” Similarly, Lewis from Orchid University emphasized the significance of government support to solve their financial issues:

The local city provided start-up funding and operating funds [for the first five

years]. It approved funding for the next five years again... How about the following five years after that? We need to discuss it further with the local government.

Elm University and Orchid University were still young. Financial support from local governments seems essential for them at this time.

### ***Overseas Partner Investment***

Participants from two institutions stated that their overseas partners had substantial investments in founding and operation of the school. Cedar University is one of the examples. Johnson from Elm University explained that in addition to substantial investment from local government, investment from Cedar University was equally important:

When the campus was put into service, we didn't have a lot of students. We provided a variety of scholarships. Our school revenue was unable to cover expenditures such as scholarships. So the shortage, during the first period of school operation [including the ongoing campus construction], was covered by the local government and Cedar University by half and half.

Another institution, Pine University that was established with one of the Hong Kong universities also received large amount of money from its Hong Kong partner. Miller from Pine University described:

Sapphire University had a continuing education college through which they made some money. It's not a lot but available to spend. So the university invested 500

million [in RMB] in the beginning as a loan without interest to our university. If the school was running well and made money, we needed to pay it back.

Moore from Pine University added that, “Our president persuaded the school board of Sapphire University to get the money out to invest in our university.” No matter what form of investment their overseas partners had made, participants agreed that foreign universities invested heavily in this form of partnership and some of them continued to provide such support.

### ***Little Funding from Chinese Partner University***

Most participants stated that their Chinese university partner did not play a role in the funding of joint venture universities. One of the reasons given by participants was that Chinese university partner who was mostly public university was not entitled to invest money in this nonpublic institution. Johnson from Elm University explained:

Elm University is promoting [the] Cedar University brand, adopting Cedar University system...[The] Chinese university, on the other hand, acts as a partner. Since we [the Chinese university] are not using its brand, nor its university degree, how can we invest money? After all, Chinese universities are public schools, they are funded by the Chinese Ministry of Education.

Moore from Pine University revealed that some Chinese university partners may request money from the established joint ventures. “They did not provide financial assistance but asked money from us...It’s like a child...making some money, you need to give some to your parents to show your respect.”

Apparently, Chinese partner universities did not play a financial role in this partnership. And the public nature of Chinese university “parents” also determined that they were unable to provide such support to the “baby” school. Local governments and overseas partner university parents thus shouldered more responsibilities in this regard.

## **5.5 Students**

Participants were asked to describe their students in terms of origin, family background, and academic performance. Their responses eventually fell into two themes: middle-class students and diverse student body. One is related to the family background of Chinese students enrolled in these institutions, the other concerns more about the percentage of international students on campus.

### ***Middle-Class Students***

The World Bank defines China as an upper-middle-income country and the world’s second largest economy with a rising middle class (The World Bank & Development Research Center of the State Council of China, 2014). Most participants described their students as children from middle-class families. How to identify middle-class in China has been a heated discussion in recent years. In terms of the Chinese society and economy, middle-class families tend to have adults with college education, professional occupational attainment, and decent income. The income of a middle-class household stands between US\$3,640 and US\$36,400 a year. The size of middle-class is estimated at about 400 million people or 140 million households, but it is relatively small compared to 1.4 billion population in China (Cyrill, 2019).

Participants related this phenomenon to the students attending their institutions. When asked what families were able to afford such high tuition, Walker from Elm University responded, “Middle-class families have the abilities. I believe it’s not a big issue for them... You must have noticed the rising number of wealthy people in coastal regions.” Moore from Pine University agreed by showing evidence that:

Children from families with financial difficulties will find it hard to enroll in this type of school... China has opened its economy to the world in the last 40 years. The looming middle class [in China] we often talk about, no matter how many children those families have, one or two, educational expenditure is not a big deal for them.

Miller from Pine University confirmed that it should be middle or upper middle-class students who were able to afford this form of university.

The cost of approximately US\$10,000 to US\$20,000 a year for a student is expensive for ordinary families in China. Participants believed only middle-class families that are financially well off are able to afford such expensive education. Their discussion affirms the supposition that only wealthy students are able to attend this type of education even though some schools offer financial aid to low-income students.

### ***More Diverse Students***

Another phenomenon at these institutions is that they have more international students than public universities in China by proportion. The two Sino-US joint venture universities, in particular, boasted a higher percentage of international students on

campus unparalleled by general public universities in China. This demographic mix makes them look more like an international university.

Johnson from Elm University stated that their institution had up to 30%-40% international students on campus, higher than Peking or Tsinghua University. Lewis from Orchid University made it more explicit that the diversity in culture is due to half population of students coming from more than 70 foreign countries:

China Central Television once visited our campus. Their journalists commented this was a truly international university because elsewhere they saw more Chinese than foreigners, but here more foreigners than Chinese...Because we have students from the home campus of Poplar university and other campuses as well.

International students contribute to cultural diversity pursued by these universities. Lewis emphasized: “The living and learning environment in our school are reflection of that cultural diversity. Our students live on campus and one Chinese student and one foreign student share a dorm room. You can hardly find such an assignment on other campuses around the world.” The cross-cultural experiences in these schools help prepare students to be global citizens.

## **5.6 Characteristics of Joint Venture Universities**

A universal feature of joint ventures in China is that they are based on Chinese soil with foreign investment and operate in the context of Chinese culture. This type of joint venture universities is not an exception. Most of the participants highlighted the characteristic as a blending of Chinese culture and delivery of overseas education which

makes them unique among higher education institutions in China. What is more, this type of institutions awards two degrees to their graduates, one from the joint venture university, the other from overseas partner university. The dual degrees received by students upon graduation makes these institutions more favorable to college applicants in China. The last characteristic these universities shared is that they are able to provide overseas education at home and provide more opportunities for students to study overseas.

### ***Cross-cultural experience***

It is interesting to note that participants unanimously referred to their institutions as a unique one in China because of its educational model brought by overseas host institutions along with immersion in Chinese culture. Miller from Pine University indicated that all institutions shared something in common due to this particular partnership: “It must be high-quality international education system...This must be genuine.”

The liberal arts education that can a symbol of western education was widely recognized at these institutions. It is perceived to be different from other Chinese universities as it is still new in China. Moore from Pine University stressed: “We believe the value of liberal arts education is more aligned with the essence of education.” Smith compared traditional education offered by Chinese public universities with liberal arts education at Elm University and touted that: “That is why I don’t like courses offered by our public universities. Students at 17 or 18 have to choose a major with little knowledge

about it.”

However, participants also emphasized the importance of Chinese culture in this regard. Lewis described that Orchid University was creative as it incorporated cultural diversity and with a focus on Chinese elements: “Chinese elements must be a showcase of this institution as it is situated in China.” Pine University shared another example of their pursuit of liberal arts education while taking into consideration the role of Chinese culture. Moore said that the design of whole person education was to instill Chinese culture into curriculum. Davis from Cherry University made it more explicit, “our goal is to build an international university rooted in Chinese land and a Chinese university with international recognition.” This explanation exemplified all institutions that take a strong step towards teaching Chinese culture while maintaining its international status.

### ***Award of Overseas Degree***

Another key feature of these universities is their award of foreign degrees to students in addition to degrees from the joint venture universities. The foreign degree certificate is deemed more valuable for students who may seek further study in graduate school in foreign countries. This strength of the “baby” university was widely acknowledged by participants during interviews.

Smith from Elm University described: “When our students graduate, they will receive a degree certificate from Cedar University, so they will be Cedar University graduates as well. This is what I think most valuable.” Johnson agreed by sharing an example:



When we hosted promotional events in Beijing, some kids who may be eligible to attend Peking University or Tsinghua University showed great interest in our institution...What they valued most is the Cedar University brand, the degree from Cedar University, four-year English instruction...Are these available at Peking or Tsinghua University?

Davis from Cherry University also reflected on earlier years when students chose their institution for the simple reason of earning a foreign degree. He said it honestly that because their institution was less known to Chinese students and parents in earlier years, so the foreign degree appealed to them most.

### ***Home Access to Overseas Education***

Participants during interviews described their schools as campuses in China that offer overseas education. This is an opportunity that Chinese students and parents value most when they consider choosing this type of university. Johnson made a comparison between their institution and ordinary Chinese universities and said, “So you can attend a small class with English instruction. This is incomparable at other universities.”

Another opportunity they can offer is overseas study if students complete two years on Chinese campus. This opportunity is considered a great advantage over traditional public universities in China when students long for overseas study experiences. Cherry University is an example in this regard. Davis described: “We have 2+2 program allowing students to study at the Ambarella university for the last two years.” Another example is Orchid University, which can provide students with one or

two semesters for study abroad. Poplar University has a number of international branch campuses. Students at Orchid University are able to choose among nearly 20 locations around the world to fulfill their overseas expectations. In a sense, these universities prepared students academically and culturally for global life in future.

### **5.7 Roles of Overseas Partner**

Foreign partner universities were expected to act as academic leader for the joint venture universities. Participants described the role of foreign partner universities in two ways. One is to lead academically and take responsibility for academic affairs including curriculum design and faculty recruitment. The other is to ensure quality standard aligned with their home institution so as to grant students their home institution's degree.

#### ***Academic Responsibilities***

The most important role that participants identified for their foreign partners is the academic responsibility. Johnson from Elm University described, "for what majors we should have, what kind of curriculum, who is going to teach, and education conception." He shared an example of a policy program at Elm University which was established considering the weakness in China and the strength of Cedar University in this area. Similarly, Poplar University is responsible for curriculum design at Orchid University as its provost and executive vice-president both came from Poplar University and represented Poplar University in shaping the curriculum system. Miller from Pine University gave it a metaphor, "it is very much like we moved the production line overseas to here."

Another aspect of academic responsibility is the recruitment of faculty directed by foreign host institutions. For example, Cedar University created a faculty search committee for Elm University. Walker from Elm University justified, “because we are a new university, we are not reputable, we have to rely on Cedar University to assist us...The quality of Cedar University, the search by Cedar University professors...They will search those meeting their qualifications, to ensure the quality of ours.” Due to the control of faculty recruitment by foreign partners, these joint venture universities usually have a high percentage of foreign faculty compared to local Chinese universities. Lewis described, “40% of our faculty are appointed jointly by Orchid University and Poplar University...We have another 40% of faculty hired globally...Poplar University assisted the hiring process. The remaining 20% are Chinese.”

### ***Quality Control***

Quality is a big concern for foreign host institutions as they invested a significant amount of money and education resources in this new form of university. What is more, they award their home institution’s degree certificate to students. Participants during interviews mentioned the quality control system in their school and the role of their foreign partners in this respect. Moore from Pine University described that:

At the time of final exams, we sent exams we prepared to Hong Kong side.

External examiners there would review the exam and gave us feedback. The purpose was to ensure our students received the same assessments as their students on Hong Kong campus.

Davis echoed the statement: “our UK partner has its own quality control system to ensure students from the Chinese campus meet its criteria.” Participants indicated that annual assessments were needed for institutions of this type, especially at the starting period of time.

### **5.8 Roles of Chinese Partner**

The roles of Chinese host institutions are various as opposed to their foreign partners. Participants discussed that Chinese universities were most likely to behave as a policy advisor or facilitator and political guard for the new form of universities in China.

#### ***Policy Advisor***

Chinese public universities are government funded and have enormous experiences in dealing with government affairs, which is a shortage of joint venture universities. Bayberry University, the Chinese partner of Elm University, was aware of the weakness and thus appointed a vice chancellor for Elm University who took special responsibility for government relations. Participants from Elm University described the role of their Chinese home institution as policy advisor or facilitator.

Walker who is representative of Bayberry University explained: “our goal was to assist Elm University. Even though it is a joint venture, it is still a Chinese university. It has much to know about China, especially in culture, laws, or regulations.” Johnson shared an example, “if Elm University wants to submit some proposals to the Ministry of Education, the proposing entity is Bayberry University. In other words, the proposal is submitted to the Ministry of Education by Bayberry University.” Both participants agreed

that the specific role of the vice chancellor was critical for Elm University. When asked if the vice chancellor represented Chinese partner in dealing with the governmental affairs, Walker clarified:

No, he represented our Elm University. We hired him from Bayberry University because he is the one we need most with expertise in that area. It is hard to find such a person from market recruitment.

### ***Political Guarantee***

Another role the participants identified during interviews is the role of political guard Chinese institutions play for the new university. In addition to policy advisor, these universities are expected to provide political protection for their new “babies”. Miller from Pine University indicated:

There has been a mounting concern about ideologies on the joint venture campuses...So our “dad” has to provide more care as a result. In other words, Laurel University is responsible for moral development while Sapphire University is responsible for academic growth.

Lewis from Orchid University put it in this way: “Tulip University should be the political guard of Orchid University...For example, the safety department had an issue to discuss with us. We asked them to speak directly to Tulip University.” Apparently, the involvement of Chinese institutions helped reduce political risk posed for these “baby” universities in China.

## 5.9 Niche of the University

When participants were asked what the niche for these joint venture universities was in terms of Chinese higher education, they responded from different perspectives. However, most of the participants categorized this form of education as neither private nor public. They viewed this type of university as a new model integrating Chinese and overseas elements and emerging as a new type to lead Chinese higher education reform. Some participants also pointed out that at earlier stages when Chinese government was not clear about the development of this form of education, some institutions functioned more as a provider of college seats to young seekers.

### *A New Model for Higher Education Exploration in China*

Most participants referred to this form of education as a new model for higher education exploration in China. The words participants used frequently are unique, creative, plural, innovative, integrated, or differentiated. Since different from other forms of education in China, some participants identified this form of education as a third one belonging to neither private nor public category. They claimed that this form of education was in the category of Sino-foreign cooperative education which was intended to have a certain amount of government fund but operated under separate system. Miller from Pine University pointed to the fact that, “it is hard to tell you the niche of us...Sometimes they considered us private. But we are nonprofit universities...Also many institutions have got financial support from local government.”

Participants further identified that this form of education was not designed to

compete with public universities such as Tsinghua or Peking University in China. It was intended to serve another purpose for Chinese higher education, the exploration of a combination of Chinese elements and overseas education style. Johnson from Elm University responded, “if you compare us with Beijing or Tsinghua University, we offer American education. If you compare us to Harvard or Stanford university, we have more Chinese elements...So we have our own niche.” Lewis from Orchid University explained, “because we are not supposed to shoulder all responsibilities for higher education in China. China is no longer in need of a gigantic university to meet all needs. There are numerous colleges and universities now in China.” Davis from Cherry University similarly, stressed on the peculiarities these universities displayed over past years: “No one told you where to go and how to do...The Ministry of Education never defined us in a single way.”

Participants agreed that this form of education existed to motivate reform in higher education. Moore from Pine University mentioned the Catfish effect during interview: “what we have been doing and what we have achieved really encouraged universities around us.” Walker from Elm University echoed: “the new education model can have a Catfish effect. Public universities in China will be able to learn from us and from our education practices that combined with educational practices from American university.” It seems that the existence of joint venture universities like a catfish helped create a competitive environment for Chinese higher education.

### ***Providing More Seats for College Seekers***

This form of joint venture universities emerged during the time when Chinese government pushed for expansion of higher education, especially in student enrollment, to meet growing social and economic demand. Some earlier universities established as Sino-foreign joint ventures were expected to shoulder such responsibility. Lewis from Orchid University recalled that: “the earliest two institutions started really low. Willow University recruited students only from third-tier applicants. It means they offered some college seats to those who didn’t have a good chance of attending college.” Davis from Cherry University echoed this statement: “in earlier years when we were not widely recognized by the public and our reputation was not high, parents and students chose us for the reason we could provide them with more option to attend college.” Both participants described early applicants as students who scored lower in the National College Entrance Examinations for their desired universities. Instead, these students chose joint venture universities as an alternative to satisfy their college aspiration.

However, the situation changed after a pause in governmental approval of joint venture universities for a few years. Lewis pondered:

For about seven or eight years, there was a suspension in approval of this form of Sino-foreign joint venture universities. I believed the Ministry of Education was reconsidering if this was the right form of education we were looking for.

Beginning in 2011 or around, the approval of Sino-foreign cooperative universities revived. A higher quality and a more stringent requirement for collaboration with overseas universities made the followers of this form of education face another task



of satisfying Chinese government in the pursuit of higher education reform, that is, to advance the quality of higher education by means of internationalization.

### **5.10 University Achievements**

During interviews, participants were asked what they considered to be the school's most significant achievements so far. Among various responses, the increase of enrollment was identified as the biggest achievement, followed by wide recognition by students and parents. Even though some universities did not pursue large student population due to campus size, they saw rising number of applicants each year as a contributing factor to expected increase of enrollment and reputation improvement. Institutions were all confident in further development based on the achievements so far.

#### ***Enrollment Increase***

Student enrollment is an indicator that participants mentioned frequently to illustrate the school growth in recent years, given limited number of students at earlier stage. Miller from Pine University recalled the fewer than expected number of students for the first year: "The first undergraduate class of students in 2005 numbered at around 200...We accepted whoever applied and seemed qualified." The number was far below their anticipated 2,000 students at the beginning. But now the student enrollment increased to more than 6,000. Miller proudly stated, "our plan was to have 6,000 undergraduate students and 2,000 graduate students, no more than that." When asked why not to expand student enrollment further, she responded, "it depends on our school revenue, campus size, teacher student ratio, and many other concerns. We have taken into

account all resources. This is the number we can serve at this time.”

The increasing number of applicants is also a welcoming sign for these universities. Lewis said, “We admitted 149 students each year from approximately 10,000 applicants the first four years. And now we have up to 20,000 applicants each year. This is really exciting.” Davis from Cherry University pointed out that they have achieved significant increase in school size which is unparalleled by institutions established recently: “We are forerunners. Those institutions that are latecomers, their school size is incomparable to ours.” According to school data released on the official website of Cherry University, the student enrollment increased from 164 students in 2006 to approximately 13,000 in 2018, a dramatic increase in over ten years, making it one of the biggest universities among Sino-foreign joint venture universities in China.

### ***More Recognition***

Recognition is another achievement that participants emphasized during interviews. Johnson from Elm University described: “From the time nobody knew you to the time many have known you and thought you are a good university. This is the achievement.” Davis from Cherry University recalled, “after the graduation of our first and second class of students, people have seen the difference in our students...the public has recognized our school and our student-centered education strategy.”

Participants also chose to cite the higher than ever admissions scores to identify the success their schools made. Davis reflected on the National College Entrance Exam score Cherry University required for incoming students:

Our admission score this year was 20 points higher than the general acceptance score for the first-tier universities in our province. Do you know what it means by 20 points? It means we are even higher than those of ‘211’<sup>1</sup> universities.

He further contended, “choosing our institution does not simply mean attending a first-tier university but also a recognition of this university and its education outcome.” A higher admission score means more selectivity of the school involved. This is what Pine University participants were proud of during interviews. Miller boasted the student quality in recent years: “Many of our earlier students failed due to our quality control in academics. They paid prices...Now our student quality has become higher and higher.”

### **5.11 University Challenges**

There are two major challenges facing these joint venture universities, as indicated by the administrator interviewees. One is the financing issue which is crucial for school development. The other is the various conflicts which were influenced by the use of different languages and the existence of different education systems that must be blended in a coherent fashion for the respective degree programs.

#### ***Financing***

Funding was considered a big challenge for joint venture universities when participants were asked what they were concerned about most. As nonpublic universities, these joint venture universities are not entitled to receive funding from Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> ‘211’ universities refer to Chinese national key universities involved in “Project 211” initiated by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 1995 which aimed to strengthen academic and research capacity of higher education in China.

government despite the fact that they have funding support from local governments.

However, local governments cannot provide constant and sufficient funding indefinitely.

Once the funding from local government is discontinued, what other sources can be available is a critical issue. Therefore, most of the participants expressed deep concern about this dilemma, especially how to obtain stable and reliable funding support.

Johnson from Elm University suggested that creating an effective funding system might be a solution for these joint venture universities. He compared Elm University with American private universities who rely primarily on endowment and endowment income: “Elm University is new and we haven’t got substantial donations. Those affluent people don’t donate to us so quickly. So the shortage of funds is incredibly large.” However, the school spending is equally enormous. Elm University spent more on best teachers, best facilities, and maintenance costs. Johnson considered: “we are now relying heavily on subsidies from local government and Cedar University. But it is not sustainable. We have to find our own way and create our own funding mechanism in the next ten or more years.”

Pine University is an institution which has achieved successful dependence on student tuition for school income to support normal operation among these joint venture universities. But the sole reliance on tuition revenue was another concern for the school leaders. Miller from Pine University explained:

We don’t have other sources of revenue. We need to pay the bank loan when the new campus put into use. The single reliance on tuition may lead to many other

problems. For example, we are unable to pay higher salary to teachers...The retention of teachers is an issue.

### ***Conflicts***

Another challenge is embedded in various conflicts existing in these joint venture universities, such as languages, cultures, and education systems. Administrator participants from Sino-US joint venture universities drew particular attention to this challenge.

Language seems to be one of the major obstacles for communication at these universities. Lewis from Orchid University described:

Our working language is English. They [foreign employees] don't speak Chinese...Two thirds of our staff are Chinese but one third of our staff are foreigners. As long as a foreigner is present at our staff meeting, I have to speak English...It is the same case for foreign students.

Johnson from Elm University echoed, "some speak the Chinese language and others speak foreign languages. They need translation. The cultural variations influence the way we express ourselves."

The western education system that overseas partners bring to the joint venture is another barrier for these universities to handle school affairs efficiently. Lewis explained, "two education systems do not match. How to match them with each other? It needs our wisdom". He suggested three strategies to deal with these obstacles: "communication, compromise, and cooperation". Without these actions, they would fall into trouble due to

disagreements. Johnson discussed, “Chinese and American education systems are completely different. The difference lies in many ways such as curriculum design, tuition pricing, and undergraduate major establishment. These challenged the American institutions as well.”

### **5.12 School Future**

Participants expressed mixed feelings towards the future of this form of joint venture universities at the end of interviews. Most of them were optimistic about the future of this education form as China’s booming economy, policy support, and globalization constitute a favorable environment for overseas investment in China. Participants cited the catfish effect unanimously when they anticipated the future market in Chinese higher education. Moore believed the investing overseas institutions would bring more competition to Chinese higher education and motivate domestic universities to improve. Johnson expected to see more education reform occur at domestic universities with the introduction of this education model.

However, participants raised concerns about funding, autonomy, and policy fluctuation considering the future of this education form. A sustainable funding is a big challenge for these institutions which participants discussed a lot during interviews. Another concern is the school autonomy. Miller from Pine University discussed:

Higher education institutions should have their own space for development. You should allow them to grow flowers with different breeds and colors. But the current trend is we are tightening the governance of higher education institutions.

Our government should be confident in the university's ability to grow and develop.

Johnson added: "I hope the Ministry of Education and relative authorities will be able to provide more fair support to this form of education and more freedom for us to develop."

Policy fluctuation is another underlying factor that influences the future of these universities from the view of participants. While participants were positive about the outcomes of Chinese policies on higher education and higher education internationalization in global market, they expressed worries regarding policy change in the years ahead. Lewis mentioned the approval suspension in the past. Miller was skeptical of further approvals of this type of universities because independent universities may be considered too powerful. It seems that the national government plays an essential role in this form of education, as implied by participants during interviews. Any trends associated with government action or decisions may influence the future of this form of university.

### **5.13 Conclusion**

Given the search for administrator participants was more difficult than anticipated, the final sample ended up with seven individuals from four institutions involved in this study. Though the sample is certainly less representative of the larger number of administrators working at these universities, findings suggest that administrators working at these institutions unanimously viewed this new form of education as unique, innovative, and challenging. The uniqueness lies in its formation

structure which requires a Chinese university partnering with an overseas university to build a new independent university. The new university was largely financed by Chinese local government and overseas partner university and claimed to be nonpublic nonprofit in Chinese higher education system. The innovation arose from blending different education systems and cultures with different roles played by the Chinese and overseas partner universities. The overseas partner is responsible for academic affairs while the Chinese partner takes more responsibility for relationship with relative authorities and governments at the national, provincial, and local levels. Every participant acknowledged the challenges that faced this type of university, including the funding dilemma, cultural conflicts, and policy fluctuations. Therefore, while they pinned their hopes on bright future of these universities, they expressed more concerns with dealing with challenges that may impact the development of these universities.



## CHAPTER 6: THEMES FROM STUDENTS

This chapter presents findings from interviews with student participants. The self-selected snowball sample consisted of three females and six males from two institutions in this study. Most of them were juniors or seniors at the time of interview. They witnessed the growth of their institutions and provided information about the institution, faculty, and peer students they observed in daily school lives. They also provided background details of their larger families and parents. Table 7 presents information concerning themes and subthemes from the student interviews.

Table 7. Summary of Themes and Subthemes from Students

Categories	Themes
Reasons to attend this form of university	<i>Parental recommendation and encouragement</i> <i>Intention to go abroad</i> <i>Underachieved score for higher ranking universities</i> <i>Low tuition compared to western universities</i>
Ways to know this university	<i>Word of mouth by parents' friends, parents' colleagues, high school alumni</i> <i>Internet search</i>
Role of parents in college choice	<i>Advisors or supporters</i>
Financial capability	<i>Parents paid the tuition</i> <i>Grandparents made contribution to tuition payment</i> <i>Less interest in scholarships and financial aid</i>
Perception of curriculum	<i>Consistent with overseas host universities</i> <i>Less challenging courses compared to public universities</i>
Perception of peers	<i>Upper middle-class students</i> <i>Engagement in study</i> <i>Different attitudes towards study</i>
Perception of teachers	<i>Diversity</i> <i>High quality</i>

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Appeals to individual students	<i>Mixed attitudes</i> <i>Exposure to different education system and a broader worldview</i> <i>Enhancement of English skill</i> <i>More access to overseas universities for future study</i>
Academic challenges	<i>English instruction</i> <i>Self-study</i>
Perception of the university	<i>Freedom</i> <i>Diversity</i> <i>Beautiful environment</i> <i>Improvement of recognition</i>
Concerns and expectations	<i>Quality of teaching</i> <i>Quality of students</i> <i>School future</i>

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### **6.1 Reasons to Attend This Form of University**

The student participants identified a variety of reasons for attending this form of university. Among them, the most important reasons appear to be parental recommendations and encouragement, intentions to go abroad, underachieved scores for desired colleges, and the relatively lower tuition compared to desired overseas universities.

#### ***Parental Recommendation and Encouragement***

Parental opinion about students' choice of schools turned out to be the most influential factor that contributed to students' decision about which school to attend. Five out of the nine participants stated that their parents, especially their mothers, played a decisive role in the choice of this form of university. Carter from Pine University responded, "without the guidance of my mom, I would have chosen other universities rather than Pine University as my final choice." Likewise, Jackson from Cherry

University had struggled with multiple school choices until his mother recommended this school to him, “I didn’t know the school at all before the National College Entrance Examination (hereinafter the Exam). It was my mom. She suggested this school before the summer break...She said it was a new school in our province but worth a consideration.”

Some other parents, even though not participating directly in the decision, were very supportive of their child’s choice to attend this form of education. James from Cherry University said, “my parents said I had two options, either to attend a university that prepared me for a good job after graduation or to attend a university that could prepare me for further overseas studies, regardless of how much money [the family has] to spend on that education.” Even though high tuition is a challenge for some families, in this student’s case, his parents did not recoil from the necessary financial support. Anna from Cherry University mentioned that, “my parents knew the school first and talked to me. We all felt that the tuition was very expensive. My parents had some hesitations before making the decision...[But] they are willing to make investments in my education.”

In general, all participants reflected that their parents had positive attitude towards this type of university and encouraged them to attend if they were accepted. The reason behind this support is largely because their parents had intention to send children abroad for continuing study and this type of university offers an education that met their need. Wilson said, “my parents thought this form of Sino-foreign cooperative education may

offer more opportunities to go overseas. So they would like me to come to this school.”

### ***Intention to Go Abroad***

Another reason that led students to make the decision is the intention to go abroad for continuing study or immigration. All participants in the interviews expressed their desire to pursue higher-level study after graduation. Their aim was to be accepted into graduate schools in western countries or Hong Kong.

Anna was very determined when she responded that she planned to go to foreign graduate schools by this means of education: “the reason is I wanted to go abroad, to earn a graduate degree or to participate in a 2+2 program<sup>2</sup> [offered by this university]. Now since I chose to stay here [not attending 2+2 program], I will aim at those foreign graduate schools.” Kimberly, likewise, stated that going abroad was one of the reasons for attending this form of university. She said her roommate planned to immigrate to Canada after graduation: “so some may be thinking of immigration. We have different goals.” So was Wilson who entered this school because his parents believed this type of university may offer more opportunities for their child who would like to pursue further overseas study.

### ***Underachieved Score for Higher Ranking Universities***

The lower than expected score on the Exam is another reason that participants stated explicitly for their choice of this form of education. The Exam score is a

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<sup>2</sup> The 2+2 program offers students opportunities to complete their degree at foreign host institutions for the final two years after they complete the first two years of study in China.

prerequisite for nearly all universities in China to admit undergraduate students. The better the universities the higher score they require in admission of students. Wilson recalled that he did not perform well in the Exam and his parents considered it unnecessary to retake the exam after a year. Hence, they chose this school as an alternative option. Jackson as well was among those who fell out of the score range for higher ranking public universities: “I wanted to go to Tongji University, but my Exam score was really low...I had no idea where to go at that time. Then my mom recommended this school to me.” Tongji University is among the first-tier universities in Shanghai and requires a bit lower score on the Exam than the top Beijing or Tsinghua University. But Jackson missed the opportunity to enter his dream school due to unsatisfactory score. Instead, he turned his attention to the joint venture university recommended by his parent and pursued another kind of college life.

Some other participants said that they chose the school based on the score they anticipated. However, they did not choose public universities at this score level but instead aimed at this form of joint venture universities for the reasons stated above, especially the opportunity to study abroad in the future. Kimberly was representative of participants in this regard. She said her parents supported her to apply for this university. If she were not admitted into this university, she would have gone abroad directly.

### ***Low Tuition Compared to Western Universities***

Contrary to Chinese students in the interviews who claimed high tuition was somehow a concern for their families, the student from South Korea stated that he chose

the school basically for the reason that it was cheaper than Canadian colleges where he was enrolled before. Eventually he chose China as an alternative to complete his college degree.

Lee, the South Korean student studying at Cherry University, was frank about his concern for the college cost when he had considered which school to go: “the basic, the first reason is it is very cheap [...] compared to Canada.” He was a transfer student from a Canadian college where he left and served in military in South Korea. When he decided to return to campus, his sister was already a college student in Canada. It thus seemed difficult for his family to support two college students at the same time: “It’s super expensive there, about 17 K for a semester. If I go, it will be double up.” In order to relieve the financial burden for his parents, he then searched for cheaper colleges elsewhere that could provide English instruction. When he was asked why he had not chosen Korean universities, he explained that he had moved to Canada since high school and did not take the Korean college entrance examination, which was required for Korean students. Consequently, he turned his attention to China and found this type of university met his needs: “I just searched Google where I can get to the universities where they teach English...I was transferred as a second-year. They said your high school was done in an English country. They don’t need English scores. I just came.”

It is very likely that Lee’s case was special in this study. However, his experience revealed a fact that these joint venture universities in China seemed competitive in terms of costs with western universities for non-Chinese students who craved an international

college education at lower costs.

## **6.2 Ways to Know This University**

The primary way to get to learn about this form of university is by word of mouth. Most participants stated that they came to learn about the university through their parents or parents' friends, relatives, or high school alumni. Only one participant, the only one international student from South Korea, stated that he relied on internet to find the school in which he was currently enrolled.

It is noteworthy that most participants acknowledged that their parents or parents' friends played an important role in the process. Carter from Pine University recalled that: "I had had no intention to enroll in this type of university. Then my mom, her college friend who had a son enrolled in this university. He graduated now. He was one year older than me and recommended this school to my mom." Lowry shared a similar story, "my parents spotted this school first because it was a university jointly operated with a Hong Kong university. My dad expected me to go to Hong Kong to study. So they offered me this option." When she was asked how her parents knew about this university. She explained that: "my dad had a colleague whose daughter graduated from this university." Wilson from Pine University explained that: "the company that my dad was working for happened to be situated in this province. This school had some reputation in this province...His colleagues heard about this university. So they recommended this university to me."

Besides parents, relatives became another source of information for students.

James became interested in this type of university because he had a relative teaching at a university in this region: “I have a relative who is a professor at a University in a nearby city. He told me the Willow University is good even though it is a joint venture university. So I applied for this school”. But later he switched to Cherry University because he found that Cherry University was much stronger in STEM than Willow University and his intended major was in STEM field.

In contrast to the large majority of Chinese students who relied heavily on their social network for information about this type of universities, Lee who came from South Korea searched the internet for schools where they could teach English. The difference between Chinese students and international students in accessing information about this form of university reveals a fact that social networking seems important for Chinese students and parents to identify the school they would like to attend. It also suggests that promoting an international reputation through internet might be a way for these universities to become known in the global higher education marketplace.

### **6.3 Role of Parents in College Choice**

During interviews, most participants described their parents as advisors or advocates for their college decision. To a large extent, parental involvement in the student’s choice of college is enormous according to interviews with these participants. Participants perceived their parents as positive influences on their college choices or the fields of study.

Jones indicated that his parents assisted him along the way in college application:



“Basically I and my parents worked together to choose the best fit schools. I told them what I wanted, such as I wanted to go to Shanghai and learn computer science.” Some parents acted as role models for their children. Jackson described his parents with pride: “their undergraduate college is better than mine... They aim high and they are willing to learn new things.”

The parental influence even extended to major choice as well. Kimberly was interested in mathematics before her mother suggested business to her. Ultimately, she chose the major in business: “my mom felt business majors are good for girls... Mathematics is hard and it takes more time to study.” Wilson was another example who took the recommendation of his parents and chose the major of electrical engineering: “my parents helped me choose this major. After the Exam, I had no idea what I should major in. I thought about medical schools. But my dad thought the working environment for doctors was not good enough. He suggested I learned something practical.” Apart from choosing a more practical or favorable major, some participants indicated that they made the decision based on their parents’ career path. Lowry was originally interested in computer science, but her Exam score turned out to be lower than the acceptance score of computer science. Consequently, her parents helped her choose finance because they both worked in finance industry. Similarly, Jackson reported that his mother was a professor at a university: “so I chose what she taught.”

Overall, these parents had the following characteristics: college education and financially well-off. James described during the interview: “one selling point of our

university is that you come to Cherry University and may have a chance to know some students from good families and [who are] motivated.” Wilson echoed: “students on this campus actually are good in quality...a lot of wealthy students.”

The parental involvement in the educational pursuit of students is evident in these interviews. The support, encouragement, guidance, and expectation for higher-level study after college woven together with a willingness to pay for an expensive college education present a picture of the parents involved in the choice of this type of colleges. Their influence on student’s choice of institutions, majors, and future education or career plan is far more significant than others.

#### **6.4 Financial Capability**

The joint venture universities are expensive in China compared to traditional public universities. However, participants reported their parents were prepared to take full responsibility for the tuition payment. The role that parents played in financial support was as significant as the role they played in college choice and education planning for their students as stated above.

##### ***Parents Paid Tuition***

Nearly all participants during interviews acknowledged that their parents paid their tuition. Lowry said: “it put some strain in our family. The tuition for our cohort was 80,000 [RMB] (equivalent US\$12,000) per year. For students at ordinary schools, their tuition was just several thousand [RMB] a year”. Jackson made it explicitly: “basically on parents. We are Chinese-foreign joint venture universities. Our school actually is not the

most expensive. As far as I know, Willow University and Orchid University are more expensive than us.” Wilson expressed concern about the tuition when he was asked who paid for the college: “the tuition, I have to say, is expensive...It is paid probably from my parents’ income or savings.” James seemed to know more about his parent’s financial situation: “it is paid from savings and income. The average income in our city is relatively low. If you depend on yearly income to pay the tuition, it’s impossible. So it must be from savings.”

Participants were fully aware of the substantially higher than average tuition charged by their institutions. However, few of them complained about the tuition burden on their parents. Lowry was the only one trying to find a campus job to pay for college expenses: “When our school offered some campus job opportunities, though not in big amount, but if there’s some, I would apply, to earn some money for living expenses.” Jackson, on the other hand, stated that he had not been aware of the amount of tuition until he was enrolled in this university and realized that this was an expensive university: “my family is just financially well-off. But my parents never cut down spending on education.”

### ***Grandparents Made Contribution to Tuition Payment***

Interviews revealed that aside from parents, grandparents made contributions to the tuition payment. Carter was one of the examples: “I remember the first year was paid not by my parents but by my grandfather. The first-year tuition was about 80,000 [RMB], the miscellaneous fees paid by my parents. Actually my grandpa said he would sponsor

all four years once I got the admission into college.” Carter further explained that he was the first grandson in his mother’s family. His grandpa had three grandchildren, but two others went abroad in secondary school. Therefore, he was the only grandchild remaining at home. He received the attention not only from parents but also from grandparents and other family members.

### ***Less Interested in Scholarships and Financial Aid***

Three out of the nine students participating in the interviews claimed that they had certain amounts of scholarships. Wilson had been awarded the amount of RMB10,000 (equivalent approximately US\$1,500) each year for three consecutive years for his academic excellence. James who had been awarded National Encouragement Scholarship of RMB5,000 a year shared details about the school scholarships: “our school offers two types of national-level scholarships, National Scholarship and National Encouragement Scholarship. I had one of them. National Scholarship is only awarded to four students in our school and limited to seniors.” He added: “a lot of scholarships offered by our school don’t have plenty of applicants. Many [students] are not interested or do not want to take time to apply.”

Participants shared that need-based financial aid was not enticing to students at this type of universities. Jackson responded: “Those financial aids are given to poor students. But in effect students at our university may be in an awkward situation not corresponding with this type of financial aid. There are some applicants. But in the end, the number given are more than the number that applied”. James echoed:

Our school used to provide up to 165 recipients of this financial aid from among three thousand students [the number of students in his year]. But it turned out to have only 120 to 130 recipients. By comparison, the competition is fierce in public schools for this amount or less, sometimes only several thousand RMB for needy students. But here, few are interested.

### **6.5 Perception of Curriculum**

Perceptions of the curriculum vary among participants. Some participants thought that the curriculum of their institutions was consistent with that of overseas host universities but with minor modifications. Others expressed concern about the curriculum design because some of the courses did not reflect what is taught at overseas host universities. However, they shared a common view that their courses were tailored to meet Chinese students' needs. In addition, a number of participants indicated that some of their courses were less challenging than those offered by Chinese public universities in several fields of study.

#### ***Consistency with Foreign Host University***

Participants involved in the interviews from the two institutions stated that their curriculum was designed with the guidance of the foreign partner university. Carter from Pine University described: "every semester our school has a curriculum review meeting. The Sapphire University usually sent a representative to the meeting...Our courses are subject to their approval." Kimberly from Cherry University compared courses with those of Ambarella University and did not find a lot of variations: "my roommate [who

participated in 2+2 program and studied at Ambarella University] made the comparison. She said it's pretty much the same except that they don't have reports while we have a report to write."

Participants thought that the variations in curriculum design seemed to adapt for Chinese education market. Anna mentioned that some of the majors offered by the joint venture university were not offered by their UK partner: "Some majors may be offered specifically for the Chinese side." Carter said their institution put more emphasis on integrating Chinese culture into courses. However, a few participants pointed out that the name of their majors appeared inconsistent with what was offered by their overseas partner university. Jones shared an example: "as far as I know there are some nuances. My major, for example, in the UK is not CS [computer science] but EE [electrical engineering]." Jackson considered in another way: "The advantage is when we apply for graduate schools, we have more options...because we study across two majors." Participants agreed that although the curriculum was designed on the basis of overseas education, it is tailored somehow for Chinese students and Chinese market.

### ***Less Challenging Courses Compared to Public Universities***

Another phenomenon that participants mentioned is that their courses may be easier than similar ones taught at Chinese public universities, especially for engineering majors. Even though this may not be universal across all joint venture universities, participants from Cherry University considered this a drawback of English instruction. Wilson reflected on his selection of courses and found that: "an issue with our

engineering majors is that some courses are not taught as deeply as they should be. I mean the [problem with the depth of course content is] due to the language issue.” James agreed by sharing some details:

Especially for foreign teachers...If he comes from India or Australia speaking English with accent, it's awful. The point is you don't understand what he is saying. If in Chinese, one sentence is enough. In English, you speak a lot to explain it and we can understand in a totally different way...so what we learned is not as deeply as those at domestic universities.

However, contrary to the reaction of Chinese participants to the courses they had taken, the Korean student who was also majored in engineering found the courses in this university more challenging than expected: “English itself is easy but the content is hard.” He had to search for tutorial videos to study after class:

Maybe because I had five years gap. That's why I felt it harder...All the Chinese they share all the information in Chinese, even books they have Chinese books. I got some of them but Chinese...Some of the modules like some concepts I don't understand. I ask them because I don't understand.

The dichotomous reaction to the difficulty of courses draws attention to the fact that English instruction resulted in a tradeoff effect in student learning. On the one hand, it benefits Chinese students and international students by aligning with international education; on the other hand, it has become a barrier for effective learning in class for Chinese students.

## 6.6 Perception of Peers

Students at the two institutions involved in the interviews were composed largely of Chinese students with a small share of international students. Participants described their peers as rich students, active learners, and having good family education. With regard to attitudes towards learning, participants stated that there existed differentiations among students regarding academic promise, persistence, or interest in the course material. Highly motivated students and poorly motivated students both existed at these universities.

### *Upper Middle-Class Students*

It is a common phenomenon that a majority of students at these institutions came from upper middle-class in China. Participants described their families as financially well-off, neither poor nor extremely rich. In addition, students pointed out that the parents of their fellow students mostly had college degrees.

James gave an assumption that 80%-90% of their peers came from affluent families that may be not extremely rich: “If their families are super rich, they will go abroad directly. Here are only those families with some money. But 400K to 500K [in RMB] for four years is not a small amount. So we must study.” Wilson mentioned that the social media and internet comments had some kind of discrimination against students at this form of university: “they thought our school is like a school open specifically for children from the rich and powerful families. Or, money can buy the way into this type of college.” Lowry reflected from daily interaction with her fellow students and said: “I felt



we had a higher percentage of travel lovers. They like posting travel photos in social media and something like that.”

Their descriptions and reflections portrayed the picture of students at these institutions. They are from families that can be identified by well-educated parents, comfortable income, and higher socioeconomic status. Just as James made comment during the interview:

Because you came to Cherry University and there is a benchmark for you to meet.

The benchmark is a little high. So on this campus you are able to meet students who are academically excellent with good personal qualities and higher family status. This is a selling point of our university, so is Willow University.

The geographical origin of students is another evidence from the interview. When asked where their classmates came from, Anna responded: “relatively rich provinces, such as the southern provinces like Jiangsu Province. Generally, more from the south than from the north.”

### ***Engagement in Study***

In the meantime, participants indicated that their school had a positive learning climate. Anna from Cherry University was satisfied with the school in that it offered a positive school climate: “Overall I am quite satisfied with the learning environment... We are serious about our study. So even if someone doesn’t study, they won’t do such things as teasing you if you are studying.” Jones echoed her statement and explained: “Students at Cherry University share some anxiety in common. Most students believed they were

losers in the Exam so they came to this school. And meanwhile we have this amount of tuition to pay. We have to study hard to ‘pay back’.” Carter from Pine University made similar comments about his peers: “the study climate is good compared to ordinary domestic colleges.”

### ***Different Attitudes towards Study***

Contrary to the favorable learning climate, participants, on the other hand, expressed that their classmates had different attitudes towards study. Some described it as polarized in students. Anna explained:

Because most of us are not from poor families, so some students don’t worry about their future and may relax the control of themselves...Of course, there are some others working very hard from morning to evening, studying or taking an intern job at the same time.

Kimberly said: “The hard-working are always working hard. Those not working hard are always not working hard.” James who had been at a public university for a short period of time responded:

Students below the average don’t study as hard as those at traditional public universities. Some are very undisciplined. I saw many at this school. They think they have money. Plus, this school offers more freedom than traditional universities. They don’t care if they can’t graduate in four years.

### **6.7 Perception of Teachers**

Students described many of their teachers as diverse, high-quality, and patient

with students. However, they expressed dissatisfaction with some teachers who were less motivated and engaged in teaching. Students were also concerned about the “so-called” freedom in this type of school which resulted in less care about students.

### *Diversity*

Faculty diversity is one of the prominent characteristics of this type of university. Participants stated that their professors comprised of an approximately 50 percent of foreign teachers and 50 percent of Chinese teachers. For the two institutions involved in the interviews, foreign faculty mainly came from the overseas host countries or the host institutions, with a small number from other foreign countries. Lowry from Pine University believed that other than teachers from Hong Kong the proportions of foreign teachers and domestic teachers were half and half: “Some are from India, South Korea, the US, the UK, or somewhere else.” Carter who was a journalism major said they had a teacher from Germany. Different from Pine University, participants from Cherry University indicated that most of their foreign teachers came from Britain. Jones explained: “the most we have are from Britain because some of them came as exchange scholars.”

However, participants from different majors described different proportions of foreign teachers in their department which may be largely attributed to the field nature of the discipline. Social sciences and humanities were likely to have a higher percentage of foreign faculty compared to STEM fields for the reason that the proficiency in English matters more in these disciplines. Wilson recalled: “our electric engineering seems to

have fewer faculty from foreign countries than business majors. Those teaching core courses for our seniors are all Chinese. Ah, yes, we've got a Korean." On the contrary, Kimberly who was majored in accounting, mentioned more foreign teachers than Chinese in her department: "we've got only two Chinese teachers." Nonetheless, participants pointed out that some international faculty were actually overseas Chinese which blurred the boundary of Chinese and overseas faculty. Anna reflected: "if we count the foreign Chinese as foreigners, then we may have 50 percent of foreign teachers in our department."

### ***High Quality***

Participants indicated that the faculty were largely PhD holders except for general education courses or electives such as English, arts, Chinese culture, and the like. The percentage of faculty with doctoral degrees seemed to vary from major to major. STEM fields seemed to have a higher percentage of PhD holders than business and liberal arts. Despite these variations, one thing was in common that almost all teachers had had overseas study or working experiences before they joined the joint venture universities.

As with other institutions in higher education, a majority of faculty at this type of joint venture universities have doctoral degrees, as evidenced by participants during interviews. Jackson shared more details: "Our teachers are doctorates in general and earned their degrees at overseas institutions. More from the UK and some from the US."

On the other hand, not all faculty were required to have doctoral degrees if they were considered to have expertise in specific disciplines and were able to make

contributions to teaching. Carter observed that:

It's not necessary to have PhD degrees. But you must be post-graduate and have rich experiences in that discipline. For example, we have a teacher who graduated from the University of Oxford. He had a great deal of experiences in the media industry. Of course, our teachers should at least have Master's degrees.

Jones from Cherry University described similar phenomenon at his school:

We even have teachers who travelled around the world and lived the life as an English teacher. I know a teacher who had stayed in Dubai for five years and came to our school with a plan to stay in China for a few years and then leave again.

### ***Mixed Attitudes***

Despite the positive descriptions of the characteristics concerning faculty working at joint venture universities, participants shared mixed feelings about their teachers in terms of teaching attitude and teaching quality.

Most participants were impressed with the patience of teachers with students, especially with domestic Chinese students who found themselves struggling with English in classroom. Anna said: "Some professors are very responsible. They can tell you how to complete this homework considering you are not a native speaker in English, or provide career tips." Jackson echoed this statement: "they won't easily get angry with you, very patient."

However, a fair number of participants expressed concern about teachers who

were not willing to communicate with students after class or appeared to not care about students. Jackson at the same time said: “the bad thing is they don’t care much about you. Just let you go. It’s all up to you.” Kimberly shared an example: “if put it this way, some professors are not willing to communicate a lot with students...Some professors are somehow arrogant. They are not responding to your email.” When asked whether these professors had office hours, Kimberly responded: “It’s only once a week. If I have a question on Friday, I have to wait until Wednesday.” For reasons why teachers spent less time with students on campus, Jones said: “maybe they have companies to run or some teachers are retired from other institutions.”

In addition, participants expressed doubts about teaching quality in classroom. Lee said: “I could see generally professors are good. But the thing is some professors, the way they deliver the lectures is not really clear. But I’m pretty sure they are smart.” James showed the same worry about the teaching quality in classroom: “I am skeptical of whether they deliver the course material as much as they can, or they are willing to teach all they have mastered. This is really dubious.”

### **6.8 Appeals to Individual Students**

Participants described their achievements from attending this form of university as exposure to different education system and a broader worldview, enhancement of English language skill, more access to overseas universities for continuing study.

Kimberly was one of the participants who benefited from experiencing different education style at this form of university: “the major achievement is I have the

opportunity to know more about foreign universities in terms of the school structure, homework, and curriculum, more compared to students at domestic universities.” Lowry from Pine University echoed this statement when she reflected on numerous presentations made in past semesters: “One of the major achievements is that it taught us how to reason, how to present ideas and research results to the audience.” Jackson seemed more reflective on the experiences at this university: “The greatest achievement I think is I have had a broader view of the world.” Wilson shared similar feeling: “I have learned to see things from other different perspectives.”

Participants also considered their English instruction as beneficial because it helped improve their English language skills. Lowry was thankful for this mode of instruction and said she had made significant progress in English. Anna presented an example:

As a non-native English speaker, you have to write a three-thousand or five-thousand-word paper in English. And the critical issue is English thinking and Chinese thinking are totally different. My essay score was not high partly because my professor didn't quite understand what I wanted to say. Now I have realized the problem and will do my best to solve it.

Similarly, Jones was excited when he mentioned the abilities to watch YouTube tutorial videos and other popular teaching videos on overseas websites. Some other participants were more specific about the benefits they could obtain from this type of university. James responded with satisfaction from attending this university which met

his expectation of going to higher-level study at overseas universities: “the achievement is I will be able to attend higher-ranking universities for Master’s or doctoral degree, which might be somehow difficult for students [from domestic universities].” James explained that the overseas degree awarded by overseas host university would be valuable for them to apply for European or American universities compared to domestic degrees granted by traditional Chinese universities.

### **6.9 Academic Challenges**

Participants seem to be more consistent on the challenge issue when they were asked about their biggest academic challenge so far. Most participants identified English instruction as the biggest challenge for their study. They had to spend a great deal of time reviewing the course materials after class and working on assignments. Some students consequently experienced a longer than expected transition into the English instruction environment created at this form of university.

James who was a senior at the time of interview admitted that he still found it difficult to adapt to English instruction in class. When asked what he would do if he could not understand during class, he responded, “I would spend more time in study after class.” Kimberly echoed, “It’s difficult to follow the professors in classroom...So we have to rely on after-class review. The learning is limited during class.” Lowry from Pine University shared similar feelings about English instruction: “The course content is okay, but when it was taught in English, I felt it hard to follow...In our sophomore year, we were required to make presentations in English. That was hard for me.”



As a result, participants highlighted the importance of self-study at this form of university. Besides, participants stated that the freedom given to students at this form of university also made the self-study more necessary. However, self-study appeared to be a challenge for participants during the interviews who perceived it as a high demand for self-discipline and time-control skill. Jackson explained why he found self-studying challenging:

Our workload is a lot. You need to take control of how you study. I felt all the joint venture universities followed this approach. Of course, teachers would do much less work as a result. But for students there are a lot we should do. So it's easy to see polarization in students. That is, those who don't manage time effectively may fail.

Jones was in the same department with Jackson and shared more from his own personal experiences:

We need to learn more outside the classroom including those we don't understand during class...We usually looked for resources mostly in English. But when English resources are few or we don't know where to search for those materials, we turn to domestic resources in Chinese. So we rely on both.

Using Chinese to help understand English is a common way for Chinese students at joint venture universities to solve the language obstacle. Lowry acknowledged the reliance on translation tools to help understand difficult course content when she was confronted with comprehension issue in English: "In our regular classes, I rely on

translation tools at times. But I have seen substantial improvement in listening and reading.”

### **6.10 Perception of the University**

Participants identified their university as a school offering enough freedom to students in classroom and outside of the classroom compared to traditional Chinese universities. They could pursue whatever interest they had and arrange their own study and campus life without stringent rules set in for them. Another characteristic that participants highlighted was diversity at this form of university in terms of student and faculty origin. Participants also emphasized the first-class school buildings and facilities that were appealing to them and their peers from traditional public universities. With regard to the success of these universities, participants mentioned the increasing enrollment of students in recent years, successful marketing to attract more students to attend, and improvement of reputation.

#### ***Freedom***

It is interesting to note that participants identified the freedom as the most unique characteristic for this form of university. They viewed it embracing more meanings for college life, either academically or socially. Anna responded directly:

I like free environment. I feel like I don't need to behave or work in a very Asian or very Chinese environment, like eating out or dealing with a variety of relationships...Our school doesn't have such rules to restrict your behavior...I am very satisfied.

Kimberly echoed:

Free or individualistic. I always do things alone, rarely get involved in groups other than my roommates...My high school friends at traditional universities have to deal with relationships with counsellors, dormitory supervisors, student union, and all others like that. It feels like they have strict regulations. We don't have such strict regulations.

Jones defined the freedom based on his own experience: "If you want to do things, you have plenty of opportunities...For example, we are close to Shanghai, so if there are opportunities there, we can go there directly. This is the freedom given to us."

Differing from the peers who emphasized the social and personal freedom in terms of student time and task management, James drew attention to the academic freedom at this form of institution: "As long as you are not that special, they allow you to pursue your own way of development assuming that you meet all basic requirements."

Lowry shared an example about selecting various types of projects to explore: "I like that way of study. Read your favorite books and do your favorite things. For me, I've really learned something." Carter touted the approach of critical thinking and opening minds to different cultures in this learning environment:

They will teach you a global thinking, not just restricted to China...They teach you how to think critically and multidimensionally. Another thing I like the joint venture university most is that it is more academically than ideologically oriented. I rarely heard about someone who was honored for good morals or hard work or

study.

### ***Diversity***

Participants compared this form of university with other traditional universities in China and stated that diversity was prominent at their institutions. Jackson from Cherry University reflected: “our school has been marketing its diversity and multicultural characteristic for years. They gave more attention to foreign students if those foreign students made accomplishments here. I think it’s okay.” Lee gave a rough number of foreign students on campus: “I heard 10 percent international people. There are about 270 Koreans here. Similar number of Indonesians. So that’s probably altogether about 500. About 200 from the UK. I know some people from Italy, some from African countries.” Lowry from Pine University said: “The faculty diversity is obvious in our university, though student diversity is not as much as that of faculty. But the campus looks diverse overall....” Participants stated that the pursuit of internationalization contributed to the level of diversity on campus. They enjoyed the benefits that internationalization had brought to them.

### ***Beautiful Buildings and Facilities***

Another noticeable characteristic of these institutions was the modern facilities and buildings that participants boasted about during the interviews. Anna from Cherry University said: “I’m quite satisfied with the physical environment. It gave me a sense of the returns for how much I paid for this college.” Carter from Pine University gave a high rating to the physical environment: “I’m satisfied. I would give a score of 85 for its

environment.” Wilson recalled that his high school friends were envious of the learning environment he was in: “My friend said if his family were rich he would have chosen to attend this school. But he may just see the outside.” However, the physical environment was appealing to participants as well when they recalled their first visit to these schools. Jackson remembered the first time he stepped into the campus: “I felt the school was beautiful. So I came.”

### ***Significant Growth in Student Enrollment and Improvement in Recognition***

Participants were at last asked what they perceived to be the success of their schools. Many responded that it should be the increasing number of applicants and student enrollment, rising tuition, school expansion, and successful marketing.

The increasing enrollment was remarkable at the two institutions involved in interviews. Lowry recalled the year she entered the university: “When I applied to this institution, it was still struggling with student recruitment. But that year turned out to be a successful year with more applicants than expected. In the following year, its admission score skyrocketed.” She added: “Our tuition is on the rise too.” Jackson perceived the university as a business entity: “It needs to survive...I feel like it is more like a company...So the biggest success or the most visible success is its growing number of students.”

Participants also mentioned the promotion of these universities in higher education market along with improvement of reputation. Anna considered their university marketing a success in terms of the university ranking in recent years: “I think our

success is in marketing. We have a new release of QS ranking this year for Chinese domestic universities. I am quite satisfied with it.”

### **6.11 Concerns and Expectations**

Participants pointed to their perspectives on some issues related to school operation. The most critical issue they perceived is the quality of teaching, which sometimes compromised the learning outcome of students in classroom and discouraged them to seek more help from professors outside of the classroom. Second, participants emphasized the need to improve the quality of students admitted into this form of university, including raising the admission standards for international students. In the meantime, they expressed concerns about the sustained development of this form of university despite a promising outlook for this form of higher education collaboration in China.

Participants from Cherry University shared a perception of some professors who showed less care for students outside of the classroom. They called for the university to improve the quality of teachers or teaching in a way to motivate and engage teachers more in helping students not only in classroom but also outside of the routine class time. Anna viewed this as a possible phenomenon in each university but still hoped for improvement: “Maybe our university can set higher standards when they hire faculty.”

Another concern is the quality of students that participants mentioned during interviews. Participants from Cherry University had witnessed the expansion of their university in campus construction and student enrollment, their concern was how to

improve the quality of admitted students alongside such expansion as the university had admitted more students over last years and was expected to continue in the years ahead.

Anna expressed her worry about the larger number of incoming students: “After you admit more and more students, the quality of students is very likely to decline.” Lee showed similar concern about the overall student quality, especially the international students: “So maybe one thing is they need to raise entry requirement for international students...I heard that TOEFL is 70. IELTS is 6 or something. It’s very low. If you are a high school student, if you pass, you can come.”

The last concern about this new form of joint venture universities is its future growth. While participants anticipated a foreseeable future with further expansion of these institutions, they raised concerns about the business mode of operation, the enhancement of reputation through its own expansion rather than depending on the overseas brand of host institutions, and curriculum improvement. Jackson had worked in a computer company for a gap year and found that few of his alumni described themselves on LinkedIn as graduates of Cherry University but the graduates of the Ambarella University, which seems harmful for improvement of school reputation. “I think the business atmosphere or business interest is a hurdle for our development...If you say you want to become a world-class research university, this is definitely not what you want to be.” James paid special attention to curriculum arrangement which appeared to lack systematic and consistent design. “You can see many inappropriate course arrangements as well as curriculum arrangement...Maybe this school is too young,

compared to schools with a history of a hundred years or several decades.” He expressed his understanding that as a young and novel form of joint venture universities in China with no prior experiences to learn from, these institutions were exploring their ways for development.

## **6.12 Conclusion**

The nine student participants from the two institutions involved in interviews provided information about their personal experiences, families, and peers associated with the joint venture universities they attended. Most of the students available for interviews were those who chose to stay on campus during Christmas break and prepared for final exams in either classrooms or student lounge where the investigator could find them. They appeared to be hardworking students making good use of time even during school holidays. Because the sample of interviewees is self-selected, it is likely not representative of all students attending joint venture universities. Consequently, their observations lack generalizability to the overall population of students at this form of universities. However, interviews revealed that students attending this form of education came from certain social groups that may be identified as upper-middle class in China. Their parents had the financial ability to afford the higher-than-average tuition charged by this type of university. Their goal was to go abroad after graduation from the joint venture university which can offer foreign degrees and four-year English instruction based on overseas curriculum. These benefits meet the needs of students and parents from this certain social class.



## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

This dissertation investigates how and why a new form of joint venture universities emerged in China and what consequences its emergence has brought to China and the world. The researcher conducted an exploratory case study with four of the nine institutions. The study utilized mixed methods, including in-depth interviews with students and administrators at the four, and content analysis of documents from the nine institutions. Previous chapters have provided major findings related to the analysis. This chapter focuses attention on interpretation of those findings. First, it provides a summary by highlighting the similarities and differences across themes from mission statements and interview data. Then it relates the findings to research questions addressed above within the framework of existing literature and discusses what findings are unexpected from it. Next, it connects the findings with Boudon's positional theory and optimal distinctiveness in organizational identity to identify what factors are behind the emergence and development of this education form from a theoretical perspective. Finally, it concludes with discussion of policy implications, limitations, areas for future research, and a brief conclusion.

The following five research questions guided this study.

1. What factors play a role in the formation of these joint venture universities?
2. How does the range of motivations, goals, purpose of overseas universities align with the Chinese parent universities?

3. What benefits and challenges do these new forms of education bring to Chinese higher education?
4. What are the intended and unintended consequences of new forms of education?
5. What is the future of the new form of joint venture universities in China?

## **7.1 Summary**

Themes that have been drawn from analysis of mission statements and interviews provide a comprehensive picture of the issues this study is intended to examine. A comparison of the data further reveals that similarities as well as differences exist among those sources of data which can help us better understand the phenomenon under study.

### ***Similarities***

As aforementioned, a foothold in the Chinese higher education landscape is a common theme found across mission statements of all institutions. And this theme is echoed by participants who perceived their institutions in the same way. In mission statements, institutions described them as schools built with the academic model introduced from western countries. In the meantime, they emphasized that they are universities established in the Chinese context. They need to abide by rules and regulations set for domestic Chinese universities and deliver an education that meets Chinese needs. The new model of joint venture universities is designed to serve Chinese society and global community. They also lead a new way for Chinese overseas higher education cooperation and spark new ideas for Chinese higher education reform.

Participants from interviews described the same way. Administrators stated that Chinese culture was an emphasis in curriculum design which would enable students to learn the richness of different cultures and prepare them to be global citizens with cultural awareness. Students during interviews recalled that their curriculum incorporated Chinese culture and provided them with a multi-cultural background to serve in future career.

Another common theme that exists in both mission statements and interviews is the emphasis on internationalization. This theme involves a wide category of data in this study. While internationalization covers a wide range of activities that may include teaching, research, as well as student or faculty mobility, the basic element associated with this type of universities is its linking with international world and aim to serving global community. In the mission statements, universities claimed that they provided students with international education which would involve world-class faculty, English instruction, cross-cultural curriculum and understanding, overseas education experience, and global perspective. Participants highlighted the international orientation as well. Administrators cited examples that a high percentage of international students on campuses increased the diversity and international level of university. Student participants said that one of the most impressive learning experiences on campus is their frequent and in-person communications with faculty coming from various countries.

The third common theme is the focus on liberal arts education. Despite the fact that not every institution pursues this education model, it exists predominantly in some institutions. Participants from these institutions concurred with this statement from their

mission statements. Administrators in particular highlighted the strength of liberal arts education by compared it with traditional Chinese education which was thought to be inflexible. Student participants valued the wide range of choices in curriculum embedded in western education model. They thought the fostering of critical thinking and global views helped open a new world for them.

The last common theme that appeared in all sources of data is the forging of new model for higher education development. Institutions in their mission statements highlighted their contribution to the field of international education by following this new model. Administrators frequently used the metaphor of catfish during interviews to describe the role of joint venture universities and their contribution to Chinese higher education market. They believed that this education innovation motivated domestic Chinese universities to seek development. Student participants said that joint venture universities were built with a new model that provided them with unique education experience that other types of domestic universities may not offer.

### ***Differences***

Mission statements of institutions and individual descriptions from interviews display divergence with regard to certain issues. The first discrepancy focuses on quality. In mission statements, high quality was the goal and commitment of each institution. Becoming world-leading university is the pursuit of several institutions as evidenced in mission statements. Administrators indicated that accreditation was usually initiated by foreign partner universities at the starting period of the joint universities. In order to

ensure continuing quality consistence with foreign providers, annual assessment or periodic evaluation occurred every two or three years at several institutions. However, students during interviews questioned the teaching quality of their institutions. They found that English instruction in class was a challenge for Chinese students. Teachers, therefore, had to lower the requirements of students in class in order to finish in due time.

The second divergence lies in the expected proportion of foreign students or faculty on campus and the actual presence of the foreign population. Except for the two Sino-US joint venture universities that have up to 50% foreign students, the other institutions are still searching for ways to attract as many foreign students as possible. Several students during interviews mentioned that their departments recruited very few international students over past years. The discrepancies show a dilemma that joint venture universities are still on the way to strive to be international universities.

The third divergence arises from the conflict between the goal of institutions in meeting the needs of Chinese society and the continuing outflow of students after graduation. In mission statements, institutions stated that they were committed to serving Chinese society. However, the increasing number of students going abroad after graduation contradicts with the goal of producing qualified workforce for domestic market. Administrators and students in interviews mentioned that more and more students chose to study abroad after graduation. The larger number of students admitted by overseas graduate schools may mean an increasing recognition of joint venture universities in international market. However, the recognition resulted in the growing

outflow of Chinese students to foreign countries may lead to “brain drain” and have negative impact on fulfilling domestic needs.

## **7.2 Answers to Research Questions**

Based on the similarities and differences discussed above, the findings provide answers to research questions raised for this study.

### ***Question 1: What factors play a role in the formation of these new joint venture universities?***

The findings of this study suggest that the pursuit of internationalization, Chinese higher education policies, economic need of local governments, and the strong influence of key persons contribute to the formation of joint venture universities. Of the four factors, higher education internationalization and globalization play a significant role in the formation of joint venture universities. Internationalization is one of the missions for universities. Students chose this type of universities for the reason that these universities could provide international education. This is consistent with previous research on cross-border education which found that globalization has driven more and more universities to move across national borders to seek opportunities abroad (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Healey, 2016; Lee, 2014; Rajkhowa, 2013). Both overseas universities and Chinese universities looked for outside world to seek partners for collaboration.

Chinese higher education policies are another factor that underlies the emergence of these joint venture universities. Since the beginning of this century, the Chinese central government has formulated a number of education policies aiming to open up higher

education to international market by either encouraging Chinese home institutions to venture into the outside world or by inviting overseas higher education institutions into China. These policies along with expansion in higher education in China served as incentives for formation of joint venture universities. Prior research on joint venture universities in China also argued that those policies encouraged various forms of education practices and to see what benefits or lessons they would bring to Chinese education system (Zha, 2011).

The third factor that made the partnership possible between the two different universities should be attributed to the support of local governments which played an important role in the establishment of these schools by providing land and facilities to the new campus. They resolved the land and funding issues for these universities at initial and critical periods of time. Some universities received more than one-time support from the local government, such as Orchid University that signed a second five-year agreement with local government for financial support. The finding provides a new insight into the role of government, especially local government in this case, in facilitating the emergence of this type of university (Horta, 2009; Lane, 2015). Some local governments even served as a third partner among the relationship. There were involved deeply in the partnerships that created the “baby” universities.

The last factor is the influence of important persons. Those key actors either held leading positions in Chinese relative authorities which had decisive power in approval of joint venture universities or worked as leading persons at partner universities and

therefore influenced the decision to set up a joint campus in China. Cherry University and Pine University exemplified the strong influence of important persons during the process of school formation. Participants from these two institutions showed great respect for their founding persons who acted decisively in the formation of the institutions. This finding contributes to prior research that paid little attention to individuals in the school formation and deepens our understanding of this higher education form in terms of the interaction of institutions, policies, and individuals in the school reality.

All in all, the four factors have a combined influence on the formation of joint venture universities. They suggest that the joint venture universities were formed not only to fulfill the need of institutions per se but also in the interest of local or national government. They serve the international community and aim at the Chinese society in the meantime.

***Question 2: How does the range of motivations, goals, purpose of overseas universities align with the Chinese parent universities?***

Overseas universities entered the Chinese higher education market for multiple purposes. But the main purpose was to enhance their worldwide reputation and to build a global network through the branch campuses set up in China and elsewhere. Interviewees from Sino-US joint venture universities indicated that their US partners intended to create a global university by opening campuses in countries like China, Singapore, Abu Dhabi, and other Asian or European countries. The strategy reflected an emerging trend in higher education globalization in recent decades. And China has been considered a must-have



destination for many western institutions, not only for its huge market but also for the promotion of a worldwide brand (Brassington, 2013). This finding is in line with existing literature which emphasized the trend of western universities pursuing a global reputation and worldwide recognition (Cabrera & Renard, 2015).

By contrast, Chinese universities did not pursue the partnership for the same purpose. Their intention was to use the overseas education resources to improve their own academic and research capabilities. For example, Bayberry University chose to collaborate with Cedar University because the “baby” university would facilitate their connection with worldwide prestigious universities such as Cedar University and increased the opportunity to expand its academic influence. Moreover, research was the focus of many Chinese universities. Administrator participants cited the cooperation in research activities as one of the examples for this concern.

***Question 3: What benefits and challenges do these new forms of education bring to Chinese higher education?***

Findings from this study suggest that the benefits that joint venture universities bring to China lie in four aspects. First, it brings world-class education, faculty, experiences, and other relevant education resources to China. Elm University shared in its mission statement that they would bring global thought, experience, expertise into this new university. Administrator and student participants pointed out that a higher percentage of faculty from overseas countries at these universities demonstrated an international advantage. Orchid University showed that foreigners accounted for 40% of

its overall faculty. Second, they help enhance Chinese host institutions in academics, research, and global influence. Foreign partner institutions were largely prestigious in their home countries. Their involvement in Chinese universities would increase academic activities in international market and make the Chinese universities better known to other countries. This is significant for Chinese domestic universities. Walker indicated from past experience that this would result in win-win; that is, not only beneficial for Chinese partner universities, but also facilitating academic and research expansion of overseas universities in China. Third, this form of education brings competition into Chinese education system and motivates Chinese institutions to seek further improvement. Administrator participants referred to the Catfish effect frequently to describe the competition mentioned above. Moore emphasized that more and more domestic Chinese universities would be interested in collaborating with foreign counterparts for further development. Fourth, it improved the level of internationalization of Chinese universities by attracting more international students to study in China. Lewis from Orchid University touted that half of their students came from countries around the world and they lived in dorms with Chinese students as a means of cultural communication. Lee, as a student from South Korea, exemplified the attractiveness of this type of university in this respect. He found that more and more overseas students like him became interested in this type of university and were attracted by the offering of English instruction and the award of overseas degrees.

The challenges, on the other hand, lie in the education systems and cultures that

the joint venture universities were built upon from different countries. Participants described that the special management of this form of education, based on half-half representation of each partner in the school board, is unique compared to other forms of cooperative education in China. Whether or not this would be a successful model for other education collaborations in China remains an issue. Miller said that instead of allowing various forms of development, the government would rather see a solidarity and conformity in these institutions. However, the various contexts in which each institution was founded, such as the investing countries and cultures, illustrates it is impossible to generate a uniform model for all institutions to follow.

***Question 4: What are the intended and unintended consequences of this new form of education?***

The Sino-foreign joint venture universities were designed to tap into foreign education resources to serve Chinese students and in the meantime expand China's influence in the world. Findings from this study suggest that the expected consequences of this education form are related to three levels: the state, institutions, and students.

For the state, the joint venture universities were established originally to meet social needs for more forms of higher education when the Chinese government called for higher education expansion in the late 1990s. A new form of joint venture education may have provided more opportunities for students who were eager to enter colleges. Having served as presidents of two universities before joining Orchid University, Lewis admitted that joint venture universities faced big challenges at the earlier time, "They started low

and were only able to admit students from third-tier college candidates. In other words, they were created to provide opportunities for those unable to enter top ranking colleges.” However, these universities were also expected to bring innovation and creativity to Chinese traditional education structure. The hybrid form of education that combined traditional Chinese education and western education style was an exploration for Chinese higher education institutions. Participants described the birth of these universities as “fresh air” that would motivate higher education reform. This is consistent with previous research on transnational education in China which argued that Chinese universities yearned to learn benefits or lessons from this new educational form (Weston, 2015; Zha, 2011).

Chinese institutions, especially Chinese partner universities, gained more access to international education resources by collaborating with prestigious universities from partnering countries. They had more opportunities to conduct international research through the help of joint venture universities where they could find partners from overseas host institutions. Walker shared from past experience that their Chinese faculty were able to cooperate with researchers from US institutions through this kind of university collaboration. Also, the improvement of education quality was a goal for Chinese institutions. This kind of collaboration between universities offered a way for Chinese institutions to improve their education by learning from their overseas partners in terms of school management, student recruitment, curriculum design, faculty development, and student services. They would be more amenable and adaptable to other

international education models by joining into this collaborative model with overseas universities.

For students, the opportunities to access foreign education and earn a prestigious foreign university degree without having to go abroad offered them more choices when they had to make a college decision. The global learning experience was considered valuable for students interested in this form of education. Participants were satisfied with their English skill improvement when they talked about the major academic achievement at this school. It seems that English instruction by these institutions gave students part of international learning experience they had expected. The international education experience in turn provided students with more access to foreign universities and prepared them better for western graduate schools. Nearly all student participants in this study said that they had intention to continue study at the graduate school in Hong Kong, UK, US, Australian, or other European universities and to earn at least a Master's degree. Miller cited that roughly 68% of their 2018 graduates received offers from graduate schools from western countries. It was a record high since the founding of this university in 2005. The joint venture universities served as a bridge for Chinese students who yearned for global learning opportunities and prepared them for challenges in future overseas study.

The unintended consequences are associated with the differentiation across these universities and the educational outcomes they produced for students. Administrator participants talked about the governmental attitude towards this form of university and

mentioned that the original idea was to create a simple stereotype of joint ventures that allowed Chinese universities to learn and imitate from their experiences and thus promote China's higher education level. But over years of development, the nine institutions in this group had pursued different strategies given the investment of foreign universities from different countries with different education backgrounds. Davis said the value of Sino-foreign joint venture universities lies in the differentiation and diversification which allows for more room for exploration. However, the increasing control of these universities by the Ministry of Education in recent years underlines the government concern with the differentiation emerging across these universities. Miller expressed concerns that the tightening control may hinder the dynamics of institutional development and undermine the exploration by these joint venture universities in higher education market.

Another unintended consequence is that it encouraged students' outbound mobility as more and more students saw the opportunity to get access to overseas education by attending this form of education. Foreign degree and international education experience offered by this kind of university would give students more credits when they apply for foreign graduate schools. Student participants claimed that their goal was to go abroad or immigrate which would fulfill their aspirations, and taking future jobs abroad would contribute to a Chinese brain drain. The increasing number of graduates receiving offers from foreign graduate schools as indicated by administrator participants demonstrated the trend of student planning after graduation. Despite the fact that the

objective of these joint venture universities was to prepare students to be global citizens with cross-cultural experiences and skills, the outflow of Chinese students to overseas countries seems to contradict with the goal of institutions set originally for Chinese market.

Lastly, the fact that only affluent students could attend this type of university limited the population served by these universities. High tuition prevented students who were from low- or middle-income families from accessing this education. While the joint venture university was created partly to provide more choices to students, the reality is that only students from upper middle class or wealthy families are able to afford this education. Administrator participants and student participants both acknowledged that students largely came from privileged social class. Students from disadvantaged social background may find it difficult to enter this type of university even if they are high achievers in school. The finding supports Boudon's social positional theory in that the increase in educational opportunities does not necessarily mean an increase in educational choice for students. Social backgrounds and family income are constraints on students' choice of institutions. Educational inequality persists with the emergence of this type of university.

***Question 5: What is the future of the new form of joint venture universities in China?***

Findings from this study suggest that the future of this new form of joint venture universities education is uncertain depending largely on the policies made by the central government and the amount of school funding. Of them, the most important is whether

this form of education could bring benefits to China and motivate Chinese higher education reform (Horta, 2009; Weston, 2015; Engel & Siczek, 2018; Zha, 2011).

Administrator participants emphasized the value of this education form. They believed the joint venture universities of this type emerged and existed as an experiment for higher education institutions and their achievements or failures would serve as valuable references for other universities. Lewis from Orchid University responded that there would be no need for these universities if they are of no values for the national education development. However, whether or not the value of joint venture universities met the governmental expectation remains unclear. That is why some participants were cautiously optimistic about this type of university considering fewer approval of institutions of this type in recent years. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has tightened its control of these joint venture universities. Previous research on cross-border education revealed similar rationale that national interest is a key driver in approaches to educational growth and internationalization (Engel & Siczek, 2018). The policy issue has complicated the future of this form of joint venture universities.

Funding is another issue that is associated with the future of this type of university. Administrator participants stated that they relied heavily on local government support for school operation. They could not answer the question of how long the government would be able to support them in the future. While some institutions were successfully operated on tuition income as the primary source of funding, such as Cherry University and Pine University, they still lacked sufficient money for expansion and



research activities. Participants expressed worries about funding future. As nonprofit nonpublic universities, joint venture universities do not have funding from the Ministry of Education and tuition revenue is not enough to cover a variety of expenditures in school operation. In a sense, the funding dilemma blurs the future of these joint venture universities.

### **7.3 Unexpected Findings**

Several unexpected findings arise from the study. First, the involvement of government in the nonpublic nonprofit joint venture universities made it difficult to accurately define them as private. One of the former presidents of Cedar University once observed that “China is the only country that has ever made the joint venture universities a stated strategy to enhance higher education through a systematic import of academic models at the institutional level” (Brodhead, 2018). There is no doubt that the Chinese government at the local level was deeply involved in the partnership of universities but to what extent they influenced the school founding and operation remains to be explored. As far as the administrator participants pointed out during interviews, local governments were involved directly in these schools in terms of funding, decision making, or policy advisory. For example, Orchid University had seats for local government officials in their school board. Those officials would voice their opinions at board meetings for issues related to funding or local services. The Ministry of Education, on the other hand, would not appear directly in school management but seemed to be a supervisor of school activities. Administrator participants mentioned the visits made by government officials

to the campus and the annual reports submitted to the Ministry of Education every year including contents such as student enrollment, student origins, and some other statistics.

Second, though forming a partnership with overseas universities, Chinese universities were not seeking global expansion by this means of collaboration. On the contrary, they aimed to attract more international students and faculty to come to China. While this was not written into mission of institutions of this type, it is consistent with the recent trend of China becoming one of largest destination countries for international students (Rhoads et al., 2014). Consistent growth and expansion were not the primary goal of setting up this university as perceived by the Chinese government. They existed more as a model, an experiment, or a sign for international cooperation in education and a pioneer for the next generation of joint ventures in higher education which would shoulder more responsibilities for the state to achieve its goal of education internationalization and globalization.

A third unexpected finding is that this innovation in Chinese higher education is less directed at domestic issues such as addressing demand from Chinese students and parents for good university educations or cutting any existing shortages of seat availability nationwide. Instead, joint venture universities are more aimed at developing higher education models that can advance China's international goals to engage the developed world, foster China's active globalization efforts, and prepare Chinese students to be part of the next generation of educated youth who are skilled academically and socially for globalization.

Furthermore, the joint venture universities have developed a distinctive organizational niche for upper middle-class families who are not wealthy enough to send their children abroad from the beginning. The niche gives these families and their children an alternative to the less prestigious state universities and a form of overseas education. The niche is an example of glocalization which refers to global products or services that are adapted to fit local markets. In a sense, joint venture universities are neither global nor local in providing the education. The multiple identities fit in the theory of optimal distinctiveness in organizational development.

#### **7.4 Theoretical Implications**

The findings of this study are consistent with two theories in terms of educational choice by students and institutional identity in higher education. Boudon's social positional theory helps explain why the emerging form of joint ventures in higher education seems not to provide more educational opportunities to all student population. Likewise, the optimal distinctiveness in organizational identity provides an explanation of how the new education form identified themselves among various forms of higher education in China and around the world to pursue development and success.

##### ***Social Positional Theory***

Findings from this study support Boudon's social positional theory in that they provide evidence in understanding how the increase in educational choices influences students' academic attainment and to what extent it gives more access to higher education in the context of the changing landscape in China. First, Boudon's social positional

theory helps explain the interrelationship of students' college choice and their socioeconomic status related to this particular type of joint venture universities. The study supports the claim that educational choices made by children from differing social classes ultimately lead to different education attainment and thus reinforce social reproduction affected by the choice (Boudon, 1974; Jackson et al. 2007; Liu, 2017). The higher than average tuition charged by these universities means that not all students are able to attend except those who are affluent enough to pay the large amount of education expenses. Students with financial constraints will find it difficult to enter this type of university even though they are high achievers in academics. A comparison with peer students at public universities during interviews further illustrates that students from less financially capable families were less likely to choose this type of college. Moreover, parental socioeconomic status and education level lead to more recognition of this education form and increase the likelihood of choosing this particular type of education. Students from professional or business families as evidenced in interviews seem to be more confident in their future academic or career success by choosing this type of university. Also, parental expectation and involvement in educational choice plays another important role in helping students believe they could achieve more, such as going abroad for further study, by attending this type of university. It seems that students from more privileged and cultured social backgrounds are more likely to succeed in translating educational choice into final education destination (Liu, 2017). The existence of this type of university thus reinforces the social inequality in college choice made by different

socioeconomic classes (Nash, 2003; Jackson et al, 2007; Boado, 2011).

Second, the geographical location of these universities along with the origin of students is consistent with social positional theory in regard to the availability of education opportunities. That is, the increase in education opportunities by the establishment of these joint venture universities does not increase the chance of students being able to make more educational choices. The restriction in availability of education forms for students is obvious for certain social group. Both students and administrators during interviews acknowledged the fact that a high percentage of students came from the province where the institution was located. As the nine joint venture institutions are all situated in Chinese highly developed regions or coastal cities, it means students from the rich, developed, eastern coastal provinces are more likely to access this form of education than other less developed provinces or central regions in China. Thus, an increase in education opportunities does not necessarily mean an increase in college access for all student population (Jackson et al., 2007; Thompson & Simmons, 2013; Liu, 2017). The emergence of this form of education, unfortunately, reinforces the inequality existing in different social classes and results in different education outcomes for different social groups.

Third, the stratification of higher education in China manifests itself in the choice of joint venture universities by students. Students who were not admitted by top ranking universities because of lower than required score in the Exam would turn their attention to this type of joint venture universities. The joint venture universities can offer them

overseas education at home and award them foreign degrees. Graduates from these universities will be more likely to earn graduate degrees in western universities. Joint venture universities are considered an alternative for students who come from wealthy families but have a desire for overseas education for future careers.

### ***Optimal Distinctiveness Theory***

This study supports and extends the theory of optimal distinctiveness in organizational identity and explains why the Sino-foreign joint venture universities referred to themselves as a third category in Chinese higher education and why they are attractive to upper middle-class students in China. First, the optimal distinctiveness helps account for the fact that these institutions try to differentiate themselves from domestic Chinese universities as well as overseas universities in order to enhance competitiveness among a variety of higher education forms (Hsu & Hannan, 2005). In China, the independent “baby” campuses with two “parent” universities, one from China and one from overseas country, are unparalleled with any other form of cooperative education with overseas investments. Also, the involvement of local government in terms of funding support differentiates them from public or private institutions in China. Compared to overseas peers, their foothold in China with the blending of different cultures and the involvement of a Chinese parent university contribute to a difference from other overseas universities. The differentiation from traditional Chinese universities and overseas counterparts is clear in school website, mission statements, curricula, mode of instruction, and dual degree awards. The interviews with school participants confirmed

that these features created the joint venture universities as optimally distinctive from other Chinese and foreign campuses available to Chinese students.

Second, optimal distinctiveness effectively unites the two units of analysis in this study, institutions and individuals, to help understand the institutional pursuit of distinct identity. Individuals including administrators and students in this study as audiences of the institution have enormous influence on school identity (Hsu & Hannan, 2005). Their expectations of the institution, such as access to overseas education during and after the college are congruent with the design of these institutions. Therefore, these institutions wishing to achieve distinct identity are appealing to certain social groups as a result. Only those who have similar perceptions and expectations with the institutions would be able to come. It is obvious with the admission of students largely coming from wealthy families in China. Though the tuition is much higher than the average level in China, students and parents from wealthy families in China are still willing to pay because they recognize the value of these institutions. On the other hand, students from this social group as audience of the institution have strong influence on strategies and further actions that lead these institutions. The interaction of values and beliefs in this form of education plays a significant role in shaping these schools' distinct identity in the landscape of Chinese higher education (Rao et al., 2003; Zuckerman et al., 2003).

Third, optimal distinctiveness is relevant in understanding not only the differentiation characterized by these joint venture universities but also conformity to the set of rules and practices in higher education (Zuckerman, 2016; Zhao et al., 2017). For

example, an emphasis on learning of Chinese culture and serving local communities, such as at Orchid University and Pine University, enhanced the connection with Chinese norms. Similarly, the offering of liberal arts education that originated in western countries, the curriculum structure based on overseas partner university, the approval of faculty in line with qualifications required by overseas partners and the award of overseas degrees demonstrated a closeness to an education norm recognized in western education structures. These are important for the joint venture universities to be recognizable and gain legitimacy not only in China but also in overseas countries, as they aimed to serve not only Chinese students but foreign students as well. Lewis from Orchid University suggested the concept of “double identity” which is to say, the joint venture university on the one hand is a Chinese university on Chinese land as perceived by Chinese education authorities and institutions; on the other hand, it is a branch campus of Orchid University for the home campus of Poplar University.

The dual roles of joint venture universities also extend the concept proposed by Padgett and Ansell (1993) in the discussion of robust identity. It means that the joint venture universities are appealing not only to Chinese students but also to foreign students. The identity formation displayed by joint venture universities for different markets helped them gain legitimacy and competitiveness in China and foreign countries. It corresponds to the glocalization in the niche development of joint venture universities in the past years. The abilities to appeal to different markets with multiple labels give them more mobility across the market (Zuckerman et al., 2003).



## 7.5 Policy Implications

This research has important policy implications regarding this new form of higher education collaboration among universities across countries and its impact on Chinese as well as the world's higher education development.

### *Policies for Joint Ventures in Higher Education*

Given the complicated situation in China that has not been developed to raise enough funds through donations or endowments to fund nonpublic institutions like this type of joint venture universities in this study, a funding policy seems essential to help solve the financial difficulties that confronted these universities. So far, the allowance for local governments to fund institutions was effective at earlier periods when these institutions needed money mostly for campus construction. However, there has not been a university who claimed to have a long-lasting support from government in this aspect as evidenced from interviews with administrators. Orchid University said that Shanghai Municipal Government promised to offer another five-year support of the institution that would end in 2023. However, whether or not they could continue to provide such support in the years that follow is of great uncertainty. Some institutions like Pine University turned to depend largely on student tuition to run the school but found unable to meet more needs for school expansion. Therefore, a hybrid funding policy integrating public and private resources may be a solution for this form of education considering their future growth.

Apart from the financing issue, joint ventures in higher education in China should

take into account the role of local government in this relationship. Even though these institutions strive to distinguish themselves from traditional Chinese or overseas universities by highlighting their uniqueness, the inclusion of local governments can help them gain legitimacy in Chinese mainstream education market. So far, the involvement of local government has complicated the funding sources and identity recognition of these institutions, as indicated by administrator participants during interviews. The nonpublic identification has become ambiguous with the investment of local government.

Therefore, a joint venture with the partner that comes from local government is beneficial for successful and sustainable operation of these institutions. Lewis from Orchid University commented on officials' participation at school board meeting and thought that it was essential at times because the institution could not operate alone without the support of local government. The three-partner format may be special for this type of Chinese-foreign joint venture universities, but it ensures a good relationship with government at the local level or even at the provincial or national level which is important for universities that were designed as nonpublic in Chinese education system.

The above two considerations actually can help create a model that combines public funding and nonpublic operation together for joint venture universities, in which local government plays a dominant role in funding and supportive role in operation, which will be an ideal type for joint venture universities if seeking longer and more successful growth in the future. This type of collaboration may be special in Chinese context in which local governments engaged in university partnership for the purpose of

benefiting regional development. But it has implications for the success of university collaboration. Policymakers in this area can go beyond university boundary and partners from locality to achieve win-win for both sides.

### ***Policies for Education Globalization in China and the World***

Administrator participants during interviews frequently mentioned that Chinese government took the new form of joint ventures as an experiment to motivate its domestic universities to embrace internationalization. Whether or not this form of education is a success, there will be a lot to learn from the venture. One thing is for sure that on the road to globalize its higher education, China still needs educational resources that overseas universities invest in this country, especially those from world's prestigious universities. Participants noted the trend that Chinese government now turned attention to more prestigious universities in western countries in order to learn from them and catch up with the world's leading level in higher education. Hence, instead of attracting top universities and inviting them to bring international education resources to China, the Chinese government should consider stepping forward and building a cooperative form of education in foreign countries to expand its globalization. The research finding also suggests that joint venture universities were not designed to address domestic needs for more higher education opportunities but aim at becoming a global player. Therefore, future policies should explore the possibility of setting up branch campus in foreign countries by learning from this type of education joint ventures.

Similarly, with China vigorously seeking international collaboration with

overseas universities, there is an increasing opportunity for western countries and their universities to enter Chinese market. China has one of the largest higher education systems in the world and provides a huge market for overseas investors including education. Universities that intend to expand globally see China as a must-have destination. This research finding has emphasized the trend in this respect. Besides China, countries in Middle East or Southeast Asia that are in shortage of world advanced higher education resources and eager to cooperate with American or European universities are other locations for this type of cooperation. Policymakers at both sides, that is in either developed or developing countries, need to take into account the globalization trend and facilitate growth of institutions in this aspect. Developing countries should take more flexible approaches to enrich its education resources. Developed countries should encourage students and faculty to move globally and spend more time overseas to propel the cultural exchange and enhance understanding of different cultures.

### ***Policies for Education Inequalities***

The unequal access to joint venture universities reflects an inequality embedded in original design of this university form. Policy makers in higher education, especially those focusing on education inequality should be aware of the consequences arising from the emergence of joint venture universities.

The first concern is related to household income and their constraints on students' college choice. Students who lack adequate family support in tuition may not be able to

attend the expensive joint venture universities examined by this study, especially for those who came from socioeconomically disadvantaged families. These students will find education opportunities at “baby” universities beyond their ability to reach only because they could not afford them. Even though the joint venture universities offered a variety of scholarships and financial aid to students, the amount was not enough to cover all needed students. Student participants revealed in the interviews that few of them applied for financial aid designed for low-income students. In other words, very few of them came from poor families. The existence of this form of joint venture universities did not improve but reinforce the unequal access to colleges and universities and made the inequality existing in Chinese higher education even worse. This phenomenon should draw the attention of policy makers in education who made great efforts to create new education opportunities for students but ignored the outcomes generated by this type of education form.

The second concern lies in the geographical location of these institutions which determines to a large extent that they are more available to students coming from the same or surrounding areas that are wealthy coastal regions compared to the vast extent of remote and inland area where education resources are sparse and underdeveloped. The uneven distribution of education resources in China did not see improvement with the establishment of the new types of universities. On the contrary, the founding of these schools with proximity to metropolitan areas or coastal regions exacerbated the unequal distribution of higher education resources, especially the world-class education resources

brought by these joint venture universities. Moreover, the cluster of education resources in certain areas promotes its attractiveness to elites and global talents to concentrate in this area and weakens the possibility of them to move to areas where education is relatively underdeveloped. It will impact the subsequent development of higher education distribution nationwide, making the developed regions more developed, the underdeveloped regions more underdeveloped.

## **7.6 Limitations**

Due to the nature of qualitative case study employed in this dissertation research, limitations are inevitable in some respects. The primary limitation is that participants were selected through the method of snowball sampling which reduces the likelihood of representing a larger population targeted by the study. Administrators and students participating in interviews only came from four institutions out of the nine under study. Their experiences and views may be associated with the institutions they represented and entail some kind of personal biases in the interpretation of certain issues. Administrator participants, in particular, were more likely to be positive and selective in the conversations, intentionally or unintentionally, in portraying their schools. Furthermore, the lack of non-Chinese interviewees in this study makes it less ideal to provide a more comprehensive and insightful picture of the phenomenon concerning this form of higher education collaboration. Faculty, staff, parents, and other stakeholders who are likely to provide more insightful views for this study are also lacking in the selection of interviewees due to time constraint and the availability of resources.

Second, four institutions that participated in interviews did not cover the foreign partners from Russia and Israel. Therefore, the dimension of overseas partners is not fully represented by the sample. The overseas partners, such as Israel and Russia, may have other motivations, different from the US or UK partners, in setting up schools with China.

As a beginner researcher in qualitative research, the investigator was also limited by the time, skill, and resources available to conduct a more comprehensive research on this specific form of education in China. Even though four trips were made to China for this study, there were still more issues to be explored if the investigator could have spent more time in China and waited for more potential participants to be interviewed. The contacts the investigator had in institutions helped her enormously extend the study to other participants. But on the other hand, the contacts' job positions posed some constraints in helping the investigator reach more powerful participants.

Also, the Chinese culture in which these institutions are embedded and seek growth and the Chinese language those participants chose to respond to interview questions may influence the way the study is intended to present. And as a Chinese researcher, the way the investigator chose to communicate with interviewees in Chinese and the translation from Chinese to English also have certain impact on the interpretation of the research findings.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic that was unexpected in the past year dwindled the possibility of further efforts to visit participants and institutions in China. It also reduced

the likelihood of in-person contact with interested parties or individuals in this research in the US. All these could have limited access to more interviews for this study.

Even though the study lacks the ability to generalize findings to more joint venture institutions outside of the group under study, it lays a foundation for more future research on this form of education collaboration and higher education reform concerning globalization and internationalization.

### **7.7 Recommendations for Future Research**

This dissertation is a preliminary study about Sino-foreign joint venture universities in China that have emerged since the beginning of this century. There remains more to be explored due to the limitations of this dissertation research. Therefore, future research may be conducted concerning the following aspects. First, expanding the sample to include not only Chinese but overseas individuals and conducting a comprehensive and intensive interview with a wide range of stakeholders involved in this form of university. Including interviews with administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents, local government officials, representatives of both partner universities will present a more accurate picture of the phenomenon under study and increase the generalizability of the findings to the entire population of joint venture universities. Meanwhile, as the joint venture universities involved in this study were formed with institutions from four countries and Hong Kong, it is essential to incorporate institutions that have partners from Russia and Israel other than the US, UK and Hong Kong in this study into future interview group and explore what is behind the motivations



of those institutions for this cross-border collaboration.

Second, this dissertation research began during the period when the latest two institutions in this category just came into service. Other institutions like Elm University were still under construction and started to admit the first class of undergraduate students. These institutions were not ready for comprehensive study at that time and their school leaders were also reluctant to participate in this study and disclose more information about school operation. Now two years passed since the investigator's first visit to one of them, and some institutions have achieved considerable growth. For example, Elm University has enrolled more than 1,000 undergraduates so far. A thorough and deep examination is needed to explore the growth mechanism of those institutions and what lies ahead for them in the next few years. More recent universities' experiences and approaches to success seem different from those of pioneering institutions as evidenced in interviews with administrators. Davis from Cherry University once said these followers in this joint venture category learned lessons from early counterparts and knew how to deal with relative authorities and to obtain approval from various levels of governments. The obstacles that confronted early institutions were no longer issues for new universities established later on. Miller from Pine University also emphasized that the latest three institutions including Rosemary University, Oak University and Dogwood University that were established after 2014 were those that were established with the blessing of government. That is, their establishments were not driven by the intention of both partner universities but by the wishes of governments in China and partnering

countries to form such partnership. The purpose and goal of establishing such universities seemed different from earlier counterparts who came to Chinese market only for the school expansion per se. However, this statement needs to be examined in future research. It may provide more evidences on the extent of government involvement in higher education expansion and shed light on the research on interconnectedness between higher education and national strategy in the context of globalization.

This dissertation was written and completed during the unprecedented pandemic due to the spread of Covid-19. Universities across the world have faced numerous challenges related to this deadly virus and a majority of them were forced to shift to virtual education. The joint venture universities in China, however, reported a rise of applications in early 2021. Both Elm University and Orchid University saw a record high number of applications for the fall of 2021 (Chen, 2021). The pandemic seemed to bring in a new opportunity for these joint venture universities. Going local has become a new trend for global network universities like the parent of Orchid University in the US. Future research can be focused on this new phenomenon and explore what will be the future like for joint venture universities in the global health crisis.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

This dissertation study investigated details underlining the emergence of Sino-foreign joint venture universities in China. Different from previous research that paid attention to the characteristics of this kind of education, this dissertation focuses attention on the particulars that underline the school formation by exploring the factors

contributing to such emergence. This study explores the phenomenon not only at the institution level but at the individual level as well. With the application of two theoretical frameworks that address concerns both at the institution and individual levels, this study revealed issues from institutional and sociological perspectives and indicate what should be noticed by policy makers in these areas. However, this study is limited due to the research constraints previously outlined. Nonetheless, the findings should gain the attention of more education scholars to this phenomenon, which may lay a foundation for more various forms of joint ventures in the higher education arena in the increasingly globalized world.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT: ADMINISTRATORS

### 1. Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research study, “Overseas Cooperative Universities.” The purpose of this research study is to investigate the emerging phenomenon of Chinese private universities that have partnerships with overseas universities. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed by Ping Mao about the formation and operation of your university as a member of the Sino-Foreign Cooperative University Union, your involvement at this institution, and your views on this form of higher education. Please read this document. The interview will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked to give your oral consent if you agree to participate in the study.

The researchers conducting this research project include: Ms. Ping Mao, a doctoral student in the Public Policy Program and Dr. Roslyn Mickelson, Professor in the Department of Sociology and Public Policy Program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

You will be interviewed by the researcher for approximately 30-40 minutes. The interview will consist of questions about your university, your professional and educational backgrounds, your involvement in this institution, and your views on Chinese overseas cooperative universities. The interview will be either audio recorded or described in notes. The audio recordings will be transcribed from Chinese by Ping Mao.

It is possible that talking about some of your personal or professional history could make you feel uncomfortable. You are welcome to skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, and you may also stop the interview at any time.

The researchers will make every effort to protect your privacy. All your responses to the interview questions will be kept confidential. The digital audio recording files will be kept on a password protected computer in a password protected folder. The recordings will be coded by a number rather than your name. After the audio recording is transcribed, it will be destroyed. The transcriptions will contain no identifying information. During the study, all transcription materials will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. When the results of this study are published, participants will be referred to by pseudonyms, not names, and their positions will be disguised, such as “administrator 1, 2”. For personal information that might be disclosing individual identity linked to the chosen institution, some minor or non-essential changes will be made upon publication to ensure the confidentiality concerning participants.

The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that all research participants are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Office of Research Compliance at (704) 687-1871 if you have questions about your rights as a study participant. If you have any questions about the purpose, procedures, and outcome of this project, please contact Ping Mao at pmao1@uncc.edu or Dr. Roslyn Mickelson at RoslynMickelson@uncc.edu.

At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked to affirm the following "I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that my oral acknowledgement indicates my informed consent."

## **2. Interview Questions**

1. What is your formal title at this university?
2. What is your role at this position?
3. How long have you been working at this position?
4. Can you tell me a bit about your education and professional background?
5. Can you tell me a bit about how you came to work at this university?
6. Can you give me a brief history of this university? (When was the university founded? Who are the founders of the university? How was the university founded? Why was the university located in this city/region? What motivated the Chinese (overseas) partners to form this collaboration?)
7. How was the partnership formed between the two institutions, i.e., the Chinese home university and the overseas partner university? Who initiated the partnership?
8. With which universities do you compete for the same Chinese students? Why do your students choose your university?
9. Tell me about the tuition and fees at your university. In your view, how are the tuition and fees at your university by comparing to those at public universities in China?
10. How is this university financed (i.e., student private fees, student loans, government finance, support from Chinese private sector, support from Chinese partner or overseas partner, support from local government, local business, donors)?
11. What is the mission of this university? Why does this university have this particular mission?
12. In your view, is the university meeting the mission's goals? Why or why not?

13. What is the student composition at your university (in terms of gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, region)?
14. What is the percent of all applicants admitted to this university?
15. Can you give me a brief description of the recruitment and admission procedures at your university?
16. How did the students and their families get to know your institution? (recruitment, advertisement, word-of-mouth from students' social networks?)
17. What is your expected number of students studying at this institution?
18. How many more students are you aiming to admit next year compared to this year? Do you have any expectation of further growth?
19. What is the composition of instructors (professors/teachers) at your university in terms of gender and ethnicity, including the percentage of Chinese and overseas teachers?
20. How do you recruit faculty? What are some other reasons why faculty choose to work at this university?
21. Are your faculty generally full-time or part-time employees?
22. Are the faculty asked/expected to conduct research as well as to teach?
23. What is the curriculum at your university? How do you compare the curriculum with your Chinese home and overseas partner universities?
24. What factors have you taken into consideration when making decisions on the curriculum?
25. Who are the people or institutions that developed the curriculum?
26. Describe the relationship between your university and the Chinese home university.
27. Describe the relationship between your university and the overseas partner university.
28. Describe the relationship between your university and the authoritative body in China, that is, the Ministry of Education.
29. Describe the relationship between your university and the eight other universities in the Sino-Foreign Cooperative University Union?
30. Describe the relationship between your university and local government?
31. Describe the relationship between your university and the Sino-Foreign Cooperative University Union with other nonpublic universities in China?
32. What are the achievements so far at your university, regarding teaching, research, market expansion and so forth?

33. What are the challenges your university has encountered so far? For example, adjustment to the Chinese education market, handling of relationships with government, peer universities, authoritative education department, and etc.?
34. What do you think is the niche of your university in Chinese higher education market?
35. What issues are important for you to concern about in terms of the current growth of this new form of education?

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT: STUDENTS

### 1. Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research study, “Overseas Cooperative Universities.” The purpose of this research study is to investigate the emerging phenomenon of Chinese private universities that have partnerships with overseas universities. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed by Ping Mao about the formation and operation of your university as a member of the Sino-Foreign Cooperative University Union, your involvement at this institution, and your views on this form of higher education. Please read this document. The interview will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked to give your oral consent if you agree to participate in the study.

The researchers conducting this research project include: Ms. Ping Mao, a doctoral student in the Public Policy Program and Dr. Roslyn Mickelson, Professor in the Department of Sociology and Public Policy Program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

You will be interviewed by the researcher for approximately 30-40 minutes. The interview will consist of questions about your university, your professional and educational backgrounds, your involvement in this institution, and your views on Chinese overseas cooperative universities. The interview will be either audio recorded or described in notes. The audio recordings will be transcribed from Chinese by Ping Mao.

It is possible that talking about some of your personal or professional history could make you feel uncomfortable. You are welcome to skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, and you may also stop the interview at any time.

The researchers will make every effort to protect your privacy. All your responses to the interview questions will be kept confidential. The digital audio recording files will be kept on a password protected computer in a password protected folder. The recordings will be coded by a number rather than your name. After the audio recording is transcribed, it will be destroyed. The transcriptions will contain no identifying information. During the study, all transcription materials will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. When the results of this study are published, participants will be referred to by pseudonyms, not names, and their positions will be disguised, such as “administrator 1, 2”. For personal information that might be disclosing individual identity linked to the chosen institution, some minor or non-essential changes will be made upon

publication to ensure the confidentiality concerning participants.

The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that all research participants are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Office of Research Compliance at (704) 687-1871 if you have questions about your rights as a study participant. If you have any questions about the purpose, procedures, and outcome of this project, please contact Ping Mao at pmao1@uncc.edu or Dr. Roslyn Mickelson at RoslynMickelson@uncc.edu.

At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked to affirm the following "I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that my oral acknowledgement indicates my informed consent."

## **2. Interview Questions**

1. What is your age, major, entering year, and [anticipated] graduating year?
2. Where did you live prior to entering the university? Did you grow up there?
3. Are you the only child in your family?
4. What if any, has been the role of your parents in your application to colleges?
5. Why did you choose this university? [THREE TOP REASONS]
6. Are you aware of the university's vision statement and the official missions of this university?
7. Did the mission/vision influence your decision to apply to this university? What is your opinion of the mission? Of the vision?
8. How do you and your family pay for your college tuition and fees?
9. Do you have scholarships or any other kind of financial aid?
10. Does the cost put any strain on your family?
11. You stated that \_\_\_\_\_ is your major. Why did you select this major?  
[THREE TOP REASONS]
12. Can you describe the curricula in your major program?
13. Describe atmosphere and learning environment in your classes.
14. How many other students are there in a typical class?
15. What is their gender? Their family background (socioeconomic status, etc.)

16. How does the instructor convey the material? Lecture/discussion/laboratory activities/reading assignments/class projects?
17. Are there individual or group assignments?
18. How do you compare yourself with the other students in terms of academic promise, persistence, interest in the course material, or other issues?
19. What is your biggest academic achievement so far?
20. What is your biggest academic challenge so far?
21. In your opinion, did your secondary education prepare you for this university?
22. How do you find the all-English teaching mode at this university? As you expected? Easier? Harder? Elaborate...
23. What is your plan after graduation from this university? Any specific goals that attending THIS particular university advances?
24. What type of work?
25. Any travel?
26. Family formation issues
27. What is your opinion of your teachers in your area of concentration?
28. In general, their best qualities [give an example]
29. In general, their worst qualities [give an example]
30. Do you get along with your classmates?
31. Do you study with them?
32. Do you socialize with them?
33. Describe your extracurricular life?
34. What is your opinion of the learning environment of this university?
35. This type of university is unique and different from traditional public universities in China. Can you describe in your own words the key characteristics and uniqueness of this form of higher education?
36. What is your opinion of this type of university [and this particular one you are attending] as compared to traditional public universities in China or universities in your own country?
37. In what ways do you think this university is successful as a joint venture university?
38. In what ways do you think this university needs to be improved as a joint venture university?
39. Is there anything related to this topic that you'd like to tell me that I haven't asked you?

Thank you.