

Chapter 19

Towards appropriate strategies for international cooperation with Chinese higher education: the Finnish case

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Introduction

In the last two decades, an increasing number of regions and countries in the world have made cooperation with China a priority in their internationalisation strategy, due to the fast Chinese economic development and the important role played by China in the global economics and politics. According to the European Commission, for instance, giving high priority to EU-China relations is not only driven by economic and commercial reasons, but also by a political interest in supporting China's sustainable development and successful transition to a stable, prosperous and open country (Brødsgaard & Lim, 2009; European Commission, 2007). The bilateral social and economic relationships always include a significant education dimension, because education exchange can strengthen the value of cultural ties and create potential mutual business opportunities (OECD, 2004, p. 4). This proposition has been especially shaped by the historical development of relationships between China and the United States of America (USA). The importance of attracting Chinese students for the USA was realised a century ago. In 1906 the president of the University of Illinois, Edwin James, wrote to the American President Roosevelt:

The nation which succeeds in educating the young Chinese of the present generation will be the nation which for a given expenditure of effort will reap the largest possible

returns in moral, intellectual, and commercial influence... Trade follows moral and spiritual domination far more inevitably than it follows the flag' (Smith, 1907).

While the USA has gained great social and economic benefits through education exchanges with China, the significance of such approach has been only noticed recently in Europe. To achieve the overall objectives in EU's strategy towards China, international cooperation and exchange between Chinese and European higher education institutions have been facilitated by a number of European Union programmes. Meanwhile, alongside the introduction of tuition fees for international students in many European countries, including the traditional welfare states Denmark, Sweden and Finland, China as the biggest education market has also become an important destination for their education export. In general, the European countries' interest in engaging in the internationalisation of higher education in China are concerning students and staff mobility, research and teaching cooperation, and export of education.

Regardless of the objectives, many individual European higher education institutions have experienced many difficulties in working with Chinese partners, and particularly entering the Chinese market. As observed by the Netherlands Education Support Office in China (NESO, 2010, p. 37): "Institutional cooperation (in China) is not established overnight ...it requires a substantial amount of planning, exchange and commitment". One of the most crucial challenges concerning planning strategies for cooperating with Chinese higher education lies in the difficulties of adapting the objectives of European countries to China's needs. Such issue has been neither paid sufficient attention to by the key actors in Europe nor well addressed in the literature.

This article is an effort to fill the gap by taking Finland as an example. Finland recently reformed its policies on internationalisation of higher education with a very clear tendency towards a market approach. For instance, exporting education to China has become one of the priorities. The aim of this study is to examine whether there is a potential fit between Finnish internationalisation strategies on cooperating with Chinese higher education and China's expectations from internationalisation in higher education, and discuss how to improve the Finnish practices on cooperation with Chinese higher education. To approach this research problem, both Finnish and Chinese policy and development with respect to internationalisation of higher education will be introduced. Nevertheless, the paper is not a rigid comparative study, meaning that the internationalisation of higher education in the two countries will be compared based on common grounds or themes. Rather, our intension is to provide a comprehensive picture of internationalisation of higher education in

China, while focus the Finnish case narrowly on its internationalisation strategies on cooperation with China.

New direction of Finnish policies on internationalisation of higher education and strategies on cooperation with China

Higher education has always been inherently international in terms of research, teaching and the mobility of scholars and students (Healey, 2008, p. 354), but what appears to be a recent trend in the international dimension is an increase in competition and commercialisation as a result of globalisation (Marginson, 2004). The market for international higher education has often been understood through the concept of cross-border education, which is generally defined as the movement of people, programmes, providers, knowledge, ideas, projects and services across national boundaries (Knight, 2005, 2006).

Knight (2006) specifies two dimensions for looking at cross-border higher education activities. One dimension refers to the subjects of movement, including people, programmes, providers, and projects/services. The other dimension is concerned with three conditions for cross-border delivery being development cooperation/aid education projects; academic exchange and linkage agreements and commercial/profit-oriented initiatives. Knight has also suggested two significant trends along these two dimensions. One is the shift from student mobility to programme and provider mobility. The other is the shift in international education policy from an “aid” approach to a “trade” rationale. This coincides with van der Wende’s (2001, p. 250) assertion that “whereas political, cultural and academic rationales have been driving internationalisation over the last decades in higher education, now, increasingly, economic rationales have started to play a role”.

Finland is currently joining the global trend. Hölttä (2007) has classified the internationalisation of Finnish universities into five consecutive but overlapping modes: 1) traditional individual based mobility, 2) internationalisation based on bilateral institutional agreements, 3) programme based internationalisation (mainly in the framework of the European Union), 4) internationalisation based on institutional and disciplinary networks, and 5) market oriented internationalisation. The internationalisation of Finnish higher education institutions (HEIs) has been traditionally characterised by the features of Hölttä’s modes two, three and four, with a long tradition of higher education provided free of charge. However, the recent higher education reform, introduced through new national legislation (Universities

Act, 558/2009) and policy guidelines (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009), intends to make the transformation to a market oriented model.

In Finland, the central and long-standing goal of the national higher education policy has been to provide equal opportunities for students from all socio-economic backgrounds (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 49). Education has been traditionally tuition fee free even for international students. Although equal opportunity and equity have been the driving forces of Finnish higher education policy for four decades, the complete absence of tuition fees for international students creates a problematic situation. Given the high share of public funding, free higher education has actually generated a threat, in the form of regressive income redistribution. Unlike the situation with tax-paying domestic students, the public rate of return is negative when international students move abroad soon after they graduate. At worst, this could mean that the money is transferred from low-income Finnish taxpayers (who are still under-represented in terms of higher education attendance) to international students, who are often from the middle and upper socio-economic classes. For this reason, imposing fees for international students can also be interpreted as a means of promoting the political goal of an equity policy in the form of greater distributional justice.

In spite of these ideological concerns, the reform is also implemented for economic purposes. In the recent reform in Finland, international education has been considered as a revenue generator for HEIs (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009). In the trade or market model, the funding of international higher education is no longer a primary public responsibility but rather is increasingly becoming a private good (Marginson, 2004). Such a market approach is underlined by two assumptions (Elonen, 2010). First, as there are few new economy-boosting companies such as Nokia in Finland, the country needs to search for alternative sectors that could bring employment and generate income. Education is one of these sectors. Second, it seems that there is a growing demand for good quality education around the world, and this state of affairs is likely to continue in the future. For the Ministry of Education (2009), the introduction of tuition fees for international students is not only an instrument to increase the international attractiveness of HEIs, but also a way to develop the export of education as a service trade.

Even though the reform has been received with hope and enthusiasm by many in the higher education sector, it has also created controversy and criticism. Some believe that tuition fees will be counter-productive to internationalisation as tuition fee free education has been the way to attract international students to Finland. In their opinion, the fees cannot be the major source of revenue for the universities (Helsingin Sanomat, 2007). Moreover, the domestic students are afraid that the

introduction of tuition fees to international students might open the door for tuition fees in general (National Union of University Students in Finland, 2009).

Regardless of these disputes, a market or an export approach to international higher education has been introduced in Finland. The current legislation in Finland has allowed higher education institutions (HEIs) to charge tuition fees for degree education from international students under two conditions. First, the 2007 Amendments to both the Universities Act (1997/645) and the Polytechnics Act (2003/351) allowed Finnish HEIs to charge fees for their degree education programmes when the fees are paid by a third organisation rather than individual students, called the “made to order” model. Second, according to the new Universities Act (558/2009) and the additional Amendments to the Polytechnics Act (2003/351) both effective from the beginning of 2010, Finnish HEIs are able to charge tuition fees on a five-year trial basis for separate Master’s programmes approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture from international students from outside the European Economic Area, provided that the arrangements include a scholarship scheme.

The equity principle, which dominates the values of Nordic welfare society, is still strong in Finland. To avoid the threat of excluding the students from developing countries from the provision of Finnish HEIs the new university law requires that institutions are allowed to charge tuition fees only if they establish a scholarship fund for students who cannot afford paying the fee by themselves. If the 5-year experiment on tuition fee based Master’s programmes shows positive results, it is likely that all international students will pay for degree programmes in Finnish HEIs afterwards.

Along with the legislation change concerning tuition fees, the Finnish government published the Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009-2015 (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2009). The strategy has set five primary aims for internationalisation: 1) to develop a genuinely international higher education community, 2) to increase the quality and attractiveness of HEIs, 3) to promote the export of expertise, 4) to support a multicultural society, and 5) to promote global responsibility.

A ministerial working group has also developed the Education Export Strategy (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2010b), with several visions and measures. These include the following 1) the precondition for education export should be based on a strong domestic education system and the high quality of education, 2) the export of education will bolster other export business, 3) the operation of education as an export industry entails networking and cooperation between the actors involved, 4) the export of education will offer versatile solutions instead of single products and services, 5) education exports will target chosen geographical areas and focus on selected fields, 6) both the education exporters and educational institutions need to

invest in product development in order to access the international education market, and 7) higher education institutions have a key position in education export.

The transition from the traditional Nordic model of higher education towards a market oriented approach will not be painless. A recent study, based on the interviews of actors involved in (potential) education export in Finland, concludes that Finnish HEIs generally have not been ready for education export, facing a number of challenges, such as the lack of experience and knowledge in marketing, the insufficient motivation and commitment, the lack of national coordination and networks for exporting education, and the need for a clear vision on education export (Cai, Hölttä, & Kivistö, 2012). There is even a lack of strategic thinking on how to implement the new internationalisation strategies (Cai & Kivistö, 2013).

The general challenges in Finnish internationalisation of higher education have been particularly reflected in its practices of cooperation with Chinese higher education. China has recently become a priority in Finnish international strategies with respect to education (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2006, 2007). While the Finnish government has reached political consensus and given enough attention on cooperation with Chinese higher education institutions, there is much room for improvement. The main challenges in practice are as follows. First, there is a lack of cultural awareness and understanding between peoples from both countries. Moreover, it is hard for many Finnish higher education institutions to establish substantial cooperation with their Chinese counterparts. Last but not least, it is not clear for most of Finns how to effectively enter the Chinese markets and how to work with the Chinese. Most Finnish higher education institutions' cooperation strategies are purely developed from a Finnish perspective, rather than being based on understanding of Chinese realities and their needs.

To overcome the challenges and find appropriate approaches to work with Chinese higher education institutions, one must first understand the policies and practices of internationalisation of higher education in China.

Internationalisation of higher education in China

Major activities

In China, the internationalisation of higher education is an inevitable result of China's integration into the global economy as well as endeavours to improve its higher education system. The process of internationalisation started as early as 1978, when

China opened its doors to foreign investment. The concrete activities can be observed in the following major aspects, namely student mobility, international dimensions in teaching and research, as well as joint education provisions.

Student mobility

Although China has been pouring huge investments into building schools and universities, it cannot keep up with the surging demand from its youth for higher education. The number of students pursuing study abroad has dramatically increased in the last three decades. By 2009, a total number of 1.62 million Chinese students and scholars had studied in 110 countries and regions all over the world, covering almost all disciplines (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2010b). According to statistics from 2005, their primary study destinations were America (32.1%), Europe (27.9%), Asia (25.2) and Oceania (14.2%) (H. Wang, 2009, p. v). Currently students from China represent the largest international student group in the world (OECD, 2009), and they are going to continue to increase their domination of the international student market in the near future (Maslen, 2007).

The growth of students studying abroad is due to China's rapid economic development and encouraging policies. As a result of the economic reform, overseas education became affordable for more and more Chinese families, primarily from the emerging middle class. This has particularly resulted in a sharp increase of self-funded overseas students after 1999. To illustrate this, in 1998, the self-funded students accounted for 65% of the total number of Chinese students going abroad for study, while the rates in 1999 and 2000 were respectively 75% and 83%. Since 2001, the figure has been always above 90% (Zhuang, Xie, & Ren, 2008, pp. 127-129). Parallel with the improvement in economic conditions, this development is also attributed to the encouraging government policy. Among a series of guidelines and regulations, what fundamentally underlines current overseas study policies in China is the principle set by the Central Communist Party Committee in 1992. It encourages students to go abroad to study, supports them to return, and allows freedom of exit and entry.

China also attaches importance to attracting international students to study in China. From 1978 to 1989, universities were permitted to accept self-paying international students, but due to the restriction on the enrolment quota provided by the State the number was small, for example, 300 in 1978 and around 2,500 in 1989 (Zhou, 2002). Since the 1990s there has been a boom in the number of international students studying in China. On the one hand, legislation has to a large extent transferred the power of recruiting international students to institutions (Shieh

& Wang, 2007). On the other hand, the growing interest among many countries in cooperating with China and entering the Chinese market has driven many of their students to study in Chinese universities.

Compared with the outward flow of students, the scale of international students studying in China is relatively small, although growing steadily. In 2009, the total enrolment of international students in Chinese higher education was 117,548, accounting for 0.4% of college students on campus (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2010a). Among the international students, the vast majority of them are enrolled in non-degree programmes. In 2009, 31.2% of new entrants took degree study programmes (with 21.5% in Bachelor degree programme; 7.8% in Master's degree programme; and 1.9% in Doctoral degree programme). Most international students in China are studying in separate programmes without much interaction with domestic students.

International dimension in teaching and research

Since the late 1990s, the focus of internationalisation in China has changed from promoting student mobility to enhancing an international dimension in teaching and research. Of significant progress in this regard is the curriculum reform (Huang, 2007, p. 54). First, an increasing number of original English-language textbooks, mainly from the US, have been either directly used in Chinese universities or translated into Chinese language versions. Second, there is a continuous effort in implementing instruction in English or bilingually (Chinese and English), together with an effort to strengthen foreign language (English in particular) skills among both teachers and students. Third, there is a dramatic expansion in the number of programmes for foreign languages/cross-cultural studies, which lead to international professional qualifications at the graduate level.

In addition, the internationalisation of the teaching profession has been strengthened (Y. Wang, 2008, p. 512). An increasing percentage of Chinese teachers have some learning or teaching experience abroad. Similarly, international experts in a variety of fields are invited to teach in Chinese higher education institutions.

Another significant development is concerned with international research cooperation. The Chinese government encourages Chinese universities and research institutes to develop joint research projects with foreign partners by obtaining support from various sources. The Chinese government has also been signing an increasing number of bilateral agreements with different countries/regions. For instance, the Science & Technology Agreement signed between the EU and China in 1998 provides a legal basis for future cooperation on science and technology

between the two sides. As a result, the EU has opened its research and technology development Framework Programme to China, which allows the participation of Chinese institutions. In turn China opened its National High Technology Research and Development Programme (863 programme) and the National Key Basic Research Programme (973 programme) to EU researchers and institutions.

Cooperation in education provisions

One of the most important characteristics of the internationalisation of Chinese higher education in the 21st century is the development in Sino-foreign joint education provisions. Several foreign higher education institutions have already established cooperation agreements with Chinese partners in providing education services in Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin as early as the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, clear policies regulating these activities were only created in 1995, when the Chinese MOE promulgated the Interim Provisions on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (hereafter referred to as the Interim Provisions). In 2001, China became a member of the WTO. According to the WTO's GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services), any form of educational activity that charges tuition fees counts as commercial activity, except for educational services wholly subsidised by the government. According to China's specific commitments to GATS' four models on service trade, only two types of activities are possible for foreign universities engaging in education provision in China: 1) establishing joint schools and programmes with Chinese partners in China, and 2) providing education services in China through individual professors and scholars upon invitation by Chinese education institutions. It should be mentioned, China has not made a commitment to foreign provision of distance educational courses and services in China. To adopt the agreements of the WTO Protocol into Chinese domestic legislation, on 1 March 2003, the State Council issued the Regulations on Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (hereafter referred to as the Regulations), in which the term Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (CFCRS) has been explicitly defined as: "the activities of the cooperation between foreign educational institutions and Chinese educational institutions in establishing educational institutions within the territory of China to provide education service mainly to Chinese citizens" (Article 2).

Both the Interim Provisions and the Regulations contain the following stipulations: foreign institutions must partner with Chinese institutions; partnerships must not seek profit as their objective; no less than half of the members of the institution's governing body must be Chinese citizens; the post of the president or

the equivalent must be a Chinese citizen residing in China; the basic language of instruction should be Chinese; and tuition fees may not be raised without approval (Garrett, 2004, p. 21). When compared to the Interim Provisions, the Regulations have some important features, namely: extending governmental support of vocational and higher education; strongly encouraging Chinese universities to cooperate with renowned overseas higher education institutions in launching new academic programmes; improving the quality of teaching and learning by importing highly qualified overseas educational resources to local institutions; and relaxing the restrictions on profit-making (R. Yang, 2008, p. 275).

Yang (2008) made a detailed analysis of the CFCRS based on the statistics of 2004. In 1995, there were only two officially approved Chinese and foreign cooperative programmes that could offer an overseas degree. By June 2004, the number of joint programmes had increased to 754, with 169 programmes qualified to award overseas degrees and 51 893 students enrolled in them. The degree programmes approved by the Chinese government are run in collaboration with 164 overseas universities and colleges. Australia has the highest number of partnership institutions, followed by the USA (26.8%), Hong Kong (13.4%), Canada (8.5%), France (6.7%), and the UK (5.5%). In terms of the levels of education, the master's programmes overwhelmingly account for 68.3% followed by the bachelor's level (27.5%), the postgraduate diploma (2.4%) and the doctoral level programmes (1.8%). By subject, most provisions are in the broad areas of business and management (61.0%), followed by IT (13.6%), engineering (7.3%), education (2.2%), law (1.7%), sports (1.7%), etc.

Since 2006, the MOE has in practice suspended the approval of CFCRS due mainly to quality concerns. During the period of 2006–2010, several China-foreign cooperation programmes were discontinued due to poor management, dysfunction and/or poor quality.

Challenges

The major motivation for China to incorporate an international dimension into higher education lies in its desire to increase the quality of higher education and improve its international reputation. The government expects that an internationalised higher education will increase China's competitiveness in the global economy. Thus, the internationalisation of higher education is not only an inevitable result of globalisation, but also a high priority in China's development strategies. Throughout the efforts of the past three decades, internationalisation has had a significant

impact on Chinese higher education development, in terms of the influx of high calibre international education resources, the import of advanced education and training models, and the development of a skilled labour force addressing the need for economic development. As a result, a number of Chinese higher education institutions have enhanced their visibility and recognition within the international community. In spite of these achievements, there is still much room for improvement. Chinese higher education faces the following challenges and dilemmas (Cai, 2011a, pp. 49-51):

- There are no satisfactory solutions to unravel Western ideologies from advanced Western education systems and educational philosophies and to avoid their conflicts to socialist ideologies.
- Low-quality foreign education resources have been introduced in China.
- International education cooperation in China is not in balance between the developed coastal areas and western hinterland.
- There is a lack of degree programmes taught in English in broad areas.

Future prospects of China's internationalisation

In spite of the aforementioned challenges, both the Chinese government and universities have come to realise that only with practice at an international level can Chinese higher education become globally competitive and eventually gain the world-class status (J. Wang, 2009, p. 67). In so doing, Chinese higher education should be more open to the outside world with further international cooperation and exchange of education resources. This has been clearly reflected in the Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) (Hereafter referred to as the Outline 2010-2020) issued by the State Council in 2010.

The underlying theme of the outline is to build the foundation for a learning society by modernising the current educational system in its entirety. The main goal of a modernised Chinese education system is to be able to provide globally competitive human resources to the working world. In order to intensify the internationalisation, the following measures are suggested:

- To continuously promote international exchanges and cooperation
- To invite high-quality foreign institutions to run joint programmes or joint schools in China

- To attract more world-class scholars and researchers to work in China
- To introduce international text books and teaching materials
- To facilitate mutual recognition of academic credentials
- To cultivate internationally competitive talents
- To admit more international students in China
- To develop more programmes and courses taught in English
- To establish overseas campuses of high-quality Chinese universities
- To improve the legal and policy framework in line with international rules

The main instruments in implementing these objectives, include: 1) providing more financial support for both Chinese students studying abroad and international students studying in China, 2) streamlining administrative procedures with respect to international issues, and 3) improving the conditions of Chinese higher education institutions to attract renowned foreign higher education institutions and scholars. In light of the outline as well as the emerging trends in China and the world, the following development tendencies can be projected in the next ten years.

Highly talented high school graduates tend to study abroad

In the past decade, a vast volume of Chinese students chose to study in undergraduate programmes abroad mainly because they could hardly gain entry into higher education in China or get enrolled in good Chinese universities. While this situation will continue, an emerging trend is that many highly competent high school students, who have the advantage in securing a study place in top Chinese universities, also join an array of studying abroad but with a different motive; i.e. pursuing high quality education and in turn enhancing their employability. Therefore, their target study destinations are prestigious overseas universities, especially the American ones. In 2010, even the MOE started to encourage high schools to assist students seeking overseas study options (N. Yang, 2011). Parallel with international classes and courses in public schools, students can receive additional support from private professional training agencies (Wu, 2011).

The Outline 2010–2020 re-affirms the policy of “supporting students to study abroad, encouraging them to return upon finishing their studies, and they are free to return or leave” and also states that “the services catering for those studying abroad will be improved”. Within such policy framework, the increase in the number of higher school graduates, especially high-quality ones, leaving to study abroad will continue to rise. Although a long-term demographic decline will reduce the pool of prospective students, it is unlikely that the absolute number of student studying

abroad will diminish. In some high schools in Beijing, more than half of the hundreds of their graduates received admission offers from foreign higher education institutions in 2011, a 40-50% increase from the previous year (Q. Wang, 2011).

New era of joint education provisions in China

There will be a rise of foreign higher education provisions in China in cooperation with local Chinese institutional partners. The Outline 2010–2020 has signalled that the Sino-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools will be encouraged and expanded. With an aim to provide policy advice for the government and train professionals needed in the practices of running joint programmes, the Research Institute on Sino-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools was established in 2010, jointly organised by Xiamen University and the University of Hong Kong. The government expects that through importing international educational ideas, curricula and teaching staff, more talent with international skills and perspectives will be cultivated in China to meet the needs of economic development. Having more foreign education in China is also considered by the government as a way to prevent brain drain. However, the government will raise the threshold, meaning only those prestigious and high-quality foreign partners can be granted permission to China.

Expansion of Chinese education export

China is going to grow as a major education exporting country. Chinese MOE has set a goal that China will host up to 500,000 international students (of which 150,000 degree students) by 2020, becoming the top destination for foreign students in Asia. There would be more scholarships available to international students as well. Meanwhile, China has ambitions of establishing more university campuses abroad, in addition to Confucius institutes.

A fit between Finland's objectives and China's needs

In short, China's interest in the internationalisation of higher education lies in three key aspects, namely meeting local educational demand, improving the quality of skilled labour, and increasing the international reputation and competitiveness of Chinese higher education (Cai, 2011b). However, the Chinese government is so far

not satisfied with the results in terms of the level of international cooperation and the quality of imported education resources. Therefore, China has shifted its focus from encouraging just any kind of international cooperation supporting Chinese universities to only working with high-quality (prestigious) foreign higher education institutions. Against this background, Chinese universities have become more selective in choosing their foreign institutional partners. Regarding the question why Chinese universities seek foreign university partners for collaboration, Willis (2006) conducted an investigation on the motivating factors behind a significant area of alliance activities and identified a range of reasons driving the Chinese Higher education institutions to form alliances with foreign universities. Among those, the top three reasons are as follows. First, Chinese universities were encouraged by the government to develop alliances so that they could offer a wide range of courses and programs, which would speed up the economic development in China. Second, through cooperating with foreign institutions, the Chinese universities could enhance their image, status and competitive position. Third, Chinese universities wish to internationalise themselves and to be part of a global academic community, by means of establishing alliances with foreign universities. All in all, the quality of foreign institutions must be high and the cooperation must serve local interests.

When Finland develops strategies on cooperating with Chinese universities and entering the Chinese education market, it must be born in mind how Finnish higher education can benefit China. In other words, the question is how to reconcile the Finnish interests on cooperation with Chinese higher education institutions with China's development goals related to internationalisation of higher education.

Is there a fit in terms of policy objectives?

In fact, Finland's and China's policy objectives on internationalisation basically supplement each other as shown in Table 1. With respect to education export, for example, Finland is aiming to export its higher education and believes that the quality of Finnish education is high. On the other hand, China needs to import high quality education to meet the increasing local demands and improve the competitiveness/international reputation of Chinese higher education. The fact that the majority of Chinese students is pursuing foreign education at their own expenses provides a solid basis for Finnish higher education to export their education to China. Therefore, by theory, there is indeed a perfect potential fit between Finnish government's ambitions and the expectations of China regarding internationalisation of higher education.

Table 1. Finland's expectations and China's interests in internationalisation of higher education

Finland's expectations	China's interests
Recruiting Chinese students to study in Finland Exporting educational programmes and services to China Education and research cooperation with Chinese universities Sending Finnish students to study in Chinese higher education	Encouraging Chinese students to study abroad Meeting growing demands for higher education by importing high quality foreign education Increasing international reputation and competitiveness Attracting international students to study in China

However, in practice such a fit can only be realised when the Finnish higher education as well as its recent approaches to export of education are correctly perceived and appreciated by the Chinese stakeholders and clients. Among many other barriers towards such end, two are crucial. First, although Chinese higher education has been to a large extent marketised in general, and particularly the Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools has a strong commercial attribute, the government is very sensitive to the words “marketisation” and “commercialisation”. From a Western perspective, the Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools is by nature the form of joint ventures. Indeed, many such kinds of organisations operate like a business. However, the Chinese government refuses to call them joint venture schools. If Finland uses the term education export, this may cause the Chinese government’s antipathy to commercialisation. At least, this may not transmit a correct signal to China, as China has been struggling with many low level foreign education institutions’ commercial activities in China.

Second, the high-quality of Finnish higher education is mainly a self-believed image in Finland. The aforementioned assumptions underlying the Finnish education export policy only become valid with respect to China, when the high-quality image is also perceived by the stakeholders of Chinese higher education, namely the government, universities, students and employers. However, the reality is that Finnish higher education is not well known in China. When Chinese universities and students try to figure out the quality of Finnish higher education institutions, the easiest approach is to checking a ranking list. In Finland, only the University of Helsinki is among the top one hundred in the most popular international university rankings, whereas the rest institutions are disadvantaged in this regard.

Towards a fit in practical approaches

It is relatively easy to resolve the first problem. When communicating with China, the Finnish government and universities should be sensitive about their language. It is important for Finnish practitioners to know and use the Chinese terms in

addressing the issues concerning international cooperation and especially providing educational services. The Chinese are willing to pay for service, but they need to buy service worthy of its value.

Therefore, the key challenge for Finland is how to let the Chinese people understand Finnish higher education and in turn appreciate its merits. When this objective is achieved, Chinese universities and students will initially come to find Finnish partners and buy Finnish education on their own initiative. Unfortunately, the true quality of Finnish education can hardly be measured and perceived, and in practice students tend to use any form of information generated by the markets, such as university rankings, students' awareness, and information available in public media, as arguments for their choices when pursuing overseas education (Marginson, 2006). In the light of this observation, instead of trying hard to transfer a self-deemed image to Chinese, the stakeholders of Finnish higher education exports need to think what aspects of Finnish higher education may attract Chinese students in general through influencing the information exchange in the markets.

The attractiveness of Finnish higher education is understood in the aspect of Finnish characteristics that meet China's expectations and interests. Such understanding implies that the attractiveness is not solely a matter of quality or reputation, but is also concerned with the China's national interests. What are these elements? When seeking answers for this question, one should think beyond the higher education realm. For instance, some attractive characteristics and reputation of the Finnish society, education system as a whole and industry can also be relevant here, if their links to higher education are taken for granted or can be easily proved. Following this train of thought, a number of attractiveness features of Finnish higher education can be summarised (Cai, Hölttä, & Lindholm, 2011).

- Finland is one of the global leaders in developing information society and innovation systems.
- Finland has won top positions in a number of international comparisons, such as PISA study, education system and quality of life.
- Finland as a traditional welfare state attaches an importance to the balance between education as a public and private good.
- Finland as a country being successively controlled by Sweden and Russia for hundreds of years understands the need of preserving the national tradition and culture.
- Finland has the highly developed quality culture in higher education as well as the most advanced quality assurance system in the world.
- Finnish government has a strong role in higher education development.
- The curricula and training in Finnish higher education have a close link to the labour market.

- All international programmes in Finnish higher education are taught in English.
- The Finnish approach to education export, implemented by the Future Learning Finland, is not above all profit driven, but emphasising the benefits of local society by importing Finnish know-how.

Identifying the attractiveness of Finnish higher education to China is only the first step for Finnish higher education institutions to prepare their way to China. In the next move they need to convince the targeted groups (education authorities, higher education institutions, students and employers) in China about the attractiveness of Finnish higher education. In so doing they need to develop proper approaches and tactics.

Conclusions

This study has introduced the reform practices, current challenges and further directions of internationalisation of higher education in China at length, which is aimed to provide Finland, as well as other European countries, a starting point to engage in the discussion on suitable strategies towards China. Without knowing what is going on in China and especially the Chinese government's concerns and intentions, it is impossible to develop the right strategies for internationalisation of higher education towards China. When cooperating with Chinese higher education, different European countries may face different challenges and need to develop their own unique strategies. Although there is no common recipe, a starting point for most European countries to plan their strategies should be based upon seeking a match between their intentions and China's objectives.

To illustrate how to think and work towards the harmonisation, this study used Finland as a case for analysis. Based on the above discussions, it can be concluded that there are good conditions for harmonising Finnish objectives and Chinese needs in internationalisation of higher education. Specifically, the Finnish strategy towards Chinese higher education and the characteristics of Finnish society and education can help China to solve the existing challenges in internationalisation of higher education and facilitate the development objectives. The analysis of Finland may hopefully provide insights for other European countries, especially those in similar contexts as Finland, to think how to achieve a fit between their national objectives and the Chinese needs in internationalisation of higher education.

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