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Creating a ‘New Shared Space’ for Quality: A Case Study of a
Sino-UK Partnership Institute

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Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy – PhD

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Abstract

Since the Reform and Opening-up policy in 1978, transnational higher education in China has made remarkable achievements during the past 40 years. Over 1000 Sino-foreign transnational partnership programmes and institutions have been established in different cities and provinces in China. Despite the rigorous development trend of Sino-foreign transnational partnership programmes and institutions, this area of transnational higher education is still under-explored in the current scholarship, especially in terms of the issue of quality assurance.

This empirical study was designed against this backdrop of transnational higher education in China. By adopting Clark’s (1983) triangle of coordination theory as the theoretical framework, it focuses on exploring how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches at the basis of a Sino-UK transnational partnership institute. Key stakeholders at different levels who were engaged in the quality assurance processes (namely academic managers, teaching academics at both institutions, and local students) were interviewed to understand their perceptions and lived experiences in relation to quality assurance at the partnership.

The study revealed the following key findings: first of all, the UK and Chinese partner institutions shared the common goal of developing a highly reputable partnership, however, their specific perceptions of quality and quality assurance differed due to the different national and institutional education contexts the two partners were in. From the UK home institution’s point of view, making sure that the partnership programmes were run in accordance with their institutional quality assurance rules and regulations was the overriding concern. Whereas, on the Chinese side, the Chinese partner, under the policy guidance of the government, placed high emphasis on introducing curriculum and
education resources from the foreign partner as a means of self-improvement and increase in reputation. Second, five major stakeholders from the macro, meso, and micro levels namely, the Chinese government, the market, the Chinese parent university, the UK home institution, and the partnership institute, were engaged in quality assurance development in this case study partnership institute. How they influenced quality assurance and the major issues that the two partners focused on differed in different phases of the partnership development. Most importantly, there was also a sense of communities of practice between the local staff members, flying faculty, and students and parents during the process of improving quality of learning and teaching in the partnership institute. The two partners worked collaboratively towards creating a ‘new shared space’ for quality to develop contextually appropriate solutions when faced with challenges and contradictions. However, crucial factors such as effective communication, mutual trust, and willingness to make compromises were the key to achieving a successful partnership. It is argued that more attention needs to be paid to the micro dimension of quality assurance practices to better support the improvement of quality of learning and teaching in transnational higher education partnerships.
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Author’s Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institutions.

Printed name  Hui Lu

Signature
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C-BERT</td>
<td>Cross-border Education Research Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP</td>
<td>English for Academic Purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENQA</td>
<td>European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaokao</td>
<td>National College Entrance Examination (NCEE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Test System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Chinese Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QAA</td>
<td>British Quality Assurance Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Under the impact of globalization, transformative changes have been taking place over the past three to four decades in various sectors, such as business, industry, transport, technology, and higher education. One of the most significant changes that have characterized 21st century higher education is the emergence of transnational higher education and its thereafter overwhelmingly rapid developments across the globe (McBurnie and Ziguras, 2006; Wilkins, 2016).

The term ‘transnational higher education’ was first coined in the Australian higher education context in the early 1990s when scholars wanted to differentiate international students recruited to Australian universities at home from those enrolled in the offshore programmes (Knight, 2005). Today, this term is no longer new. Despite differing definitions in different literature (Knight, 2002; Huang, 2007), the most commonly used one is provided by Council of Europe - UNESCO (2001, p.2), which defines transnational higher education as “all types of higher education study programmes or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a different country from the one where the awarding institution is based”. This definition implies that transnational higher education has covered a broad range of higher education models and embodies the unique characteristic of crossing national boundaries to provide education services locally. With the current rate of development, transnational higher education can be categorized into 7 major forms: namely, international branch campus, franchising, articulation, validation, articulation, dual degree, and distance learning (Henderson, Barnett and Barrett, 2017). According to Caruana and Montgomery (2015), these transnational higher education activities are primarily concentrated in
Southeast Asian countries such as China, Malaysia, and Singapore, where there is a great demand for these seemingly attractive foreign higher education provision services.

Although the expansion of transnational higher education appears to be a largely positive trend, concern has also been voiced regarding the quality of these transnational partnership provisions, as some transnational programmes were reported to be operating as ‘degree mills’, placing more emphasis on financial reward than educational provision (Kinser and Lane, 2013). In response to this, quality assurance was introduced at the institutional level to demonstrate programmes’ legitimacy to the public (Farrugia and Lane, 2013; He and Wilkins, 2017). In addition, at the international and national level, international organisations (e.g. UNESCO, ENQA, and ANQAHE) (Bennett et al., 2010; Smith, 2010) and national governments in some countries or regions (e.g. China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan) have also published a series of quality assurance policies and guidelines to regulate transnational higher education provisions (Zhou, 2009; Mok, 2012; Hou, 2014). The construction of quality assurance frameworks at different levels indicates that transnational higher education partnerships operate in a rather complex system. Quality assurance in transnational higher education partnership involves cooperation and coordination among varying stakeholders, from partner institutions to governments. This highlights the challenges in balancing the interests and resolving the conflicts between stakeholders during the processes of quality assurance across the partnership in the two countries.

China is one of the world’s largest importing countries of transnational higher education (Yang, 2008). Supported by the Chinese central government, transnational higher education in China has made tremendous progress over the past 40 years. This is indicated not only in terms of the number of Sino-foreign cooperative programmes and institutions which have arisen but also in terms of the level of cooperation between the Chinese and
foreign higher education partners. Various types of transnational higher education now operate in China, such as Sino-foreign cooperative universities (e.g. University of Nottingham, Ningbo; Shanghai New York University; and Kunshan Duke University), Sino-foreign partnership institutes/second-tier colleges (e.g. Shanghai International College of Fashion and Innovation, Donghua University; Sydney Institute of Language & Commerce, Shanghai University; and ZJU-UoE Institute, Zhejiang University), and numerous joint programmes which are attached to Chinese universities.

The emergence of Sino-foreign joint programmes and institutions, not to mention the benefits these bring, has been welcomed by the Chinese government, higher education partners, and students. For example, these partnership institutions have provided Chinese students with opportunities to gain access to foreign education resources without the necessity of going abroad. From the perspectives of the Chinese and foreign higher education partners, developing partnerships can not only help generate financial revenues for both sides, but also create potential opportunities for research collaboration as well as develop university internationalization strategies. In place for nearly 40 years, these partnership programmes and institutions have become an integral part of Chinese higher education (Yang, 2008).

The research interest of this study was generated against the background of transnational higher education development in China. Considering the diversity in Sino-foreign partnership in terms of the different countries and activities involved, I decided to focus on researching partnership institutes between China and the UK. Partnership institutes refer to second-tier colleges affiliated to a Chinese public university which are run in partnership with a foreign higher education institution. There were two reasons that I chose to study Sino-UK partnership institutes. First of all, the UK is one of the leading exporters of transnational higher education in China. There are currently 17 established Sino-UK
partnership institutes offering programmes in various subjects, such as IT, engineering, business, and languages. Despite this popularity, only a limited number of empirical studies have been conducted in the context of Sino-UK partnership institutes, with the notable exception of Ennew and Fujia (2009), Zhuang and Tang (2012), and Han and Zhang (2017). It appears that research has been done predominantly on Sino-Australian partnerships. This research gap in empirical knowledge has therefore encouraged me to focus on Sino-UK partnership institutes. The second reason is that I am studying in the UK, which means that I will be at an advantage when it comes to researching partnerships between China and the UK: firstly, in terms of getting to know the British higher education system first hand and secondly, in being able to conduct my fieldwork in the UK. Thus, the factors of convenience and practicality have also played a role in determining my research interest.

1.2 Research Rationale

As Lin (2010) emphasizes, quality is the lifeline of Sino-foreign transnational partnership institutions. The development of quality assurance is crucial for Sino-foreign transnational higher education institutions in terms of its sustainable and healthy development. Mok and Han (2016) suggested that in recent years, with the development of Sino-foreign partnership programmes and institutions, the Chinese government has shifted its attention from the quantity to the quality of Sino-foreign partnerships with an aim to increasing the overall level of quality of China’s transnational higher education. However, it is important to note that the task of developing quality assurance in transnational higher education is not easy. One of the major reasons for this is that it involves various stakeholders from different parties who may hold different values, interests, and motives, which makes the process of quality assurance so complex.
Indeed, transnational higher education is a complex world. There are varying stakeholders engaged in a transnational partnership, such as the national governments, higher education academic managers, teachers, students and external quality agencies who exert influences on how quality activities are designed and practiced. Their focuses on quality may vary. For example, as discussed in the research context Chapter 2, the Chinese government places a high emphasis on encouraging Chinese public higher education institutions to introduce advanced education resources from the foreign partner, whereas the foreign education partner might be more obligated to meet domestic quality and accountability standards. This is expected because China and the UK have such different education traditions and systems, and as a result demonstrate different motives for engaging in transnational activities. Having acknowledged the differences in the key stakeholders’ interests and concerns, I am curious to learn what complexities arise with regards to their roles and influences on quality assurance during the process of partnership.

Another key problem is that the concept of quality is difficult to clarify in a higher educational context. This creates some difficulty in developing quality in a partnership, particularly in the context of transnational higher education cooperation (Stella, 2006). There is a need to explore how the concept of quality is perceived by different stakeholders in transnational partnerships. However, no research has yet been conducted in investigating different stakeholders’ perceptions of quality in a Sino-UK transnational partnership context.

Since the publication of the Regulation of Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools in 2003, there has been a proliferation of articles published with regards to Sino-foreign joint programmes and institutions. These articles have approached issues in Sino-foreign joint programmes and institutions from various perspectives. For example, Xue (2017) focused on an analysis of the policies of reform and development of Sino-foreign
cooperation in running schools. He pointed out that there are conflicts between the Chinese and foreign education partners’ pursuits during collaboration. The Chinese partner pays more attention to introducing high-quality educational resources from the foreign partner to enhance the level of quality, whereas the foreign partner cares more about economic benefits and investment returns, which leads to disagreements over tuition fee standards, financial returns, staffing arrangements, and quality assurance models. Other scholars have focused on introducing the current situation of Sino-foreign partnership programmes and institutions in general with an emphasis on their individual characteristics (Li, 2016; Yang and Shi, 2017). However, there is little research on how the mechanisms of quality assurance work in a Sino-foreign transnational partnership institute.

Having recognized the important roles of the key stakeholders in quality assurance in transnational partnerships, I am particularly interested in exploring the mechanism of how key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in this study.

1.3 Research Aims and Research Questions

Currently, there are up to 17 Sino-UK partnership institutes in China. It is easy to understand that each institute’s development may vary according to their specific contexts; for example, which UK institution they collaborate with, and what types of the agreements they signed. Given this diversity and complexity, this study uses a one case study approach to gain a deeper understanding of the operating quality assurance mechanisms in the case study institute. Specifically, it aims to investigate the influences of the key stakeholders from both partner institutions on quality assurance approaches during the quality assurance processes. It sets out to explore the key stakeholders’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance, the dynamic interplay between key stakeholders during their engagement in quality assurance processes, and the complex social and institutional conditioning that
affects the key stakeholders’ approaches to quality assurance. By adopting a single case study, this study aims to contribute to an in-depth understanding of the complexity in quality assurance processes in a Sino-UK transnational higher education partnership research context, examining the wider social contexts (beyond the two partner institutions) and the engagement between the UK home institution and Chinese host institution within the collaboration.

Based on the research background and the research aims outlined above, this study intends to answer this following overarching research question:

- How do the key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in a Sino-UK partnership institute?

In order to address this comprehensive question, four specific questions are developed to further uncover the complexity of this research question:

1. How do the key stakeholders perceive the concepts of quality and quality assurance in this case study partnership?
2. What approaches do the key stakeholders use to ensure quality?
3. What roles do the key stakeholders play during the partnership?
4. What factors influence stakeholders’ engagement in the quality assurance processes?

1.4 Research Design

As mentioned above, this study is a single case study of a Sino-UK transnational partnership. Taking an interpretivist worldview that knowledge is constructed through the interaction between humanity and the outside world, I adopted a qualitative research approach to conduct this study. My major research methods included document analysis,
semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The fieldwork took place in the UK and subsequently Chinese partner institutions. At the UK research site, I interviewed the key staff members in different roles who were involved in the partnership project under investigation, including the UK dean of teaching and learning who was the quality executive of the UK side, the senior quality officer who was responsible for institution’s internal quality policy regulations and procedures, the partnership director who was responsible for negotiation and discussion on quality issues, 5 programme directors, 3 teacher trainers, and one subject teacher. Equally, on the Chinese side, I interviewed the academic managers and local teachers who were based at the local institute. By interviewing staff at both sides, I aimed to understand the positioning of the two partners take during the collaboration and compare the similarities and differences between the two partners in their roles and influences in quality assurance processes. In addition, 3 focus group discussions were organized to explore the students’ perspectives of quality assurance.

1.5 Research Significance

This study is the first single case study which systematically and comprehensively examines the roles of the UK and Chinese key stakeholders in the process of quality assurance in the context of a Sino-UK transnational partnership institute. The findings contribute to the knowledge of how quality assurance mechanisms work in a case study partnership from the initial programme setting up stage, through the delivery stage to the enhanced phase. By exploring the roles of the key stakeholders in quality assurance practices, this study shows that in the context of a Sino-UK transnational partnership institute, 5 key stakeholders, namely, the Chinese national government, the market, the UK home institution, the Chinese parent university, and the partnership institute interact with each other to exert different levels of influences in quality assurance at different stages of the partnership. For practical implications, the findings of this study highlight the need for
the UK and Chinese higher education managers and teachers to understand each other’s needs and quality assurance contexts and call for a deeper discussion on what quality should mean in a transnational partnership. The findings of this study also provide an insight into the future for university managers and teachers regarding the issues they need to be aware of when developing quality in a partnership. Moreover, the study has also proposed an idea of creating a ‘new shared space’ for quality in transnational partnerships as transnational higher education institutions may encounter differences or mismatches in their understandings or ways of developing quality. This is important to avoid misunderstanding or conflicts between the two partners during their partnership. In all, the findings of this study remind existing transnational higher education partners and future ones to have an open attitude, mutual respect, and to be prepared for negotiations in transnational higher education quality development.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into 7 chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the research background of this study and provides the rationale of why this case study was conducted. In addition, it presents the research aims and research questions, research design and research significance.

Chapter 2 sets up the scene for this study. It provides a general context of transnational higher education in China, reviews the historical development of Sino-foreign cooperation in partnership programmes and institutions, and the current situation regarding Sino-UK transnational partnership institutes. This chapter also introduces the national quality assurance regulatory systems in China and the UK respectively for transnational higher
education provisions. The research context chapter highlights the differences in quality assurance systems between the two nations.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. It reviews selected literature on the concepts of quality and quality assurance from both the Western and Chinese higher education contexts, and the complex issues relating to quality in transnational higher education collaboration. Adopting Clark’s triangle of coordination as the analytical lens for this study, this chapter also reviews literature concerning the roles of the key stakeholders in quality assurance in higher education. Lastly, it discusses the key factors that are critical to the success and sustainable development of transnational partnerships.

Chapter 4 describes the research design and methodology of this study. This chapter describes the philosophical underpinning of this study, the qualitative research approach and single case study research design. It specifically explains the methods used for data collection and how the data is analysed afterwards. Ethical issues, validity and reliability, the limitations of the findings as well as the role of the researcher are also discussed.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 present, analyse and discuss the research findings. Chapter 5 focuses on answering the first research question of this thesis: how do the key stakeholders perceive the concepts of quality and quality assurance? Chapter 6 focuses on investigating how the key stakeholders are engaged in quality assurance practices. It explores the roles of the key stakeholders, the approaches they used to ensure quality, and highlights the key factors that influence the key stakeholders’ engagement in quality assurance practices.
Chapter 7 identifies the key findings of this study and focuses on discussing them in depth with the assistance of the existing literature. It also provides recommendations on what issues to be aware of in order to develop quality assurance effectively in future transnational partnerships in China. Also, this chapter points out potential research ideas for future researchers.
Chapter 2 Research Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research context of this study. It has two major sections. Section 2.2 describes the wider context of transnational higher education in China. It introduces the definitions of transnational higher education, the historical development of transnational higher education in China, the major motives for the emergence and rapid growth of transnational higher education and the current situation of Sino-UK transnational partnerships. Section 2.3 highlights the issues of quality and quality assurance in transnational higher education. It describes China’s national quality assurance regulatory mechanisms for transnational partnerships and the UK’s regulatory frameworks for overseas programmes, and highlights the challenges in developing quality assurance in a Sino-UK partnership when the two systems meet.

2.2 Transnational Higher Education in China

As the world’s second largest economy, China has been one of the world’s largest importer countries for transnational higher education since the mid-1990s. This section focuses on presenting the context of transnational higher education in China. It introduces the definitions of transnational higher education and its major forms in generic terms, describes the historical developments of transnational higher education in China as well as the specific forms of Chinese-foreign transnational partnerships, and summarizes the major motives for the rapid development of transnational higher education in China. This study is particularly focused on Sino-UK transnational partnerships. Thus, Section 2.3 provides a description of Sino-UK transnational partnerships.
2.2.1 Definition of Transnational Higher Education and its Major Forms

The term ‘transnational higher education’ is no longer new to the scholarship. In literature, some scholars also use it interchangeably with ‘cross-border higher education’, ‘offshore higher education’, and ‘borderless higher education’ (Knight, 2005). As for the definition, the Council of Europe - UNESCO (2001, p.2) defines transnational higher education as:

All types of higher education study programmes or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a different country from the one where the awarding institution is based.

The definition of transnational higher education also suggests that there are at least two partners involved in transnational higher education activities: both the importing and exporting countries. Indeed, based on the characteristics of transnational higher education institutions’ activities, Huang (2007) categorises transnational higher education players into three types: the import-oriented type; the export-oriented type; and an import and export type.

An import-oriented type refers to the type of higher education institution which imports more higher education services and programmes from other countries than it exports. Often, these import-oriented institutions are found in developing countries where the quality of higher education may not be as high as that of developed nations. Globally, the major import-oriented countries are located across the world in different regions; in Asia, these include China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Mok & Yu, 2011; Leung & Waters, 2013; Sutrisno & Pillay, 2015); in the Middle East, United Arab Emirates and Qatar (Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011), and in Africa Senegal, Tunisia, and Mauritius
(Aupetit et al., 2007). Transnational higher education has brought a great number of benefits to these importer countries, most notably economic gain resulting from student recruitment, increased competitiveness in education domestically, and the provision of high-quality human resources for the economic development of local economies (Alam et al., 2013; Urbanovič & Wilkins, 2013).

The export-oriented type refers to those who are more focused on exporting higher education services to other countries. Such transnational higher education institutions are often located in developed Western nations which enjoy a reputation for high quality education, such as the US, UK, Australia, and Canada. According to the latest statistics from the Cross-border Education Research Team (C-BERT, 2017)\(^1\), so far, the US (77) is the largest exporter of international branch campuses in the world followed by the UK (38). These developed Western nations constitute the majority of exporters of transnational higher education.

However, it is noted that with the development of transnational higher education, nowadays the boundary between exporter-oriented and importer-oriented countries has become less clear cut. More and more importer countries are exporting educational services to other countries simultaneously. As the world’s largest transnational higher education importer country, China has also started to export higher education overseas, predominantly in southeast Asian countries, for the purpose of disseminating Chinese culture and cultivating a favourable environment for domestic economic growth (Hu & Willis, 2016). For instance, Xiamen University has established an international branch

campus in Malaysia providing undergraduate programmes to local students in subjects such as Chinese studies, traditional Chinese medicine, science in marine biotechnology, and international business. However, this study will focus solely on transnational higher education in China from the point of view of an importing nation.

In practice, transnational higher education is rather complex and has taken a variety of forms. In the literature concerning higher education in a global context, the delivery of transnational higher education is categorised into 7 major forms: namely, 1) international branch campuses; 2) joint degrees; 3) dual degrees; 4) articulation; 5) franchising; 6) validation; and 7) distance education (British Council, 2013). The specific meanings of these models are provided in the table below.
Table 2-1 Main TNE Delivery Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TNE Models</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International branch campuses</td>
<td>An offshore higher education entity that is operated in the name of the degree-awarding institution, but located in a partner country, and in many cases, requires the assistance of the local institution. Upon successful completion of the programmes, the students are awarded with the foreign institution’s degree (Becker, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franchising</td>
<td>Similar to the idea of McDonaldisation (Altbach, 2012) that a foreign provider authorises a local partner to deliver its courses and programmes, issuing qualifications in the name of the foreign provider institution. The local institution is required to comply with the standards and regulations of the foreign provider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>The process by which a foreign provider institution judges and validates a programme developed by a host institution to make sure it has met their quality assurance standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation</td>
<td>Programmes in which students study in the local institution for the first two or three years and then transfer to the foreign institution for the rest of the programme through credit transfer. In this case, students are awarded with degrees from both institutions upon successful completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual degree programmes</td>
<td>Two or more partner institutions in different countries collaborate to design and deliver a common programme. The students receive a qualification from each institution upon completion of the programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint degree</td>
<td>This is similar to a dual degree in that two or more education partners collaborate to deliver a programme. However, the difference is student receives only one degree which has the logos of each partner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance learning</td>
<td>Higher education institutions provide education programmes or services through virtual methods, such as television, radio, computer, or video. This type of transnational higher education came into existence with the facilitation of modern technology.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


However, due to differences in higher education traditions and contexts, the specific forms of transnational higher education may differ between nations. Indeed, a review of the literature suggests that transnational higher education in China has evolved into primarily two forms, namely, Sino-foreign joint institutions and Sino-foreign joint programmes (Hou
et al. 2014). Moreover, among Sino-foreign joint institutions, there are two types of institutions as well, namely, Sino-foreign cooperative universities and Sino-foreign joint institutes. The term ‘Sino-foreign cooperative universities’ refers to campus scale partnerships that have independent legal status, whereas ‘Sino-foreign joint institutions’ refers to partnership institutes jointly established by the Chinese and foreign education partners but which remain attached to the Chinese parent institution. In essence, they belong to second-tier colleges (erji xueyuan) and do not have independent legal person status (Mok and Han, 2016a). Table 2.2 provides a detailed description of the features of these three types of Sino-foreign transnational higher education.
Table 2-2 Three Types of TNE in China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of TNE operations in China</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sino-foreign cooperative universities</strong></td>
<td>A full campus scale university with legal person status established in China by a host Chinese HEI and a foreign partner HEI/ provider in cooperation, offering education to Chinese students mainly through double/ joint degree programmes. This cooperative university is not affiliated with the host Chinese HEI. There are currently 8 Sino-foreign cooperative universities in China, including the University of Nottingham Ningbo (UNNC) and Shanghai New York University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sino-foreign joint institutes (second-tier colleges)</strong></td>
<td>A college/ school without legal person status established in China by a host Chinese HEI and a foreign partner HEI/ provider in cooperation, offering education to Chinese students mainly through double/ joint degree programmes. This joint institute is affiliated with the host Chinese HEI. There are currently 52 Sino-foreign joint institutes in China, including the Sino-French Institution at Renmin University of China and the Sydney Institute of Languages and Commerce at Shanghai University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sino-foreign joint programmes</strong></td>
<td>An education programme without legal status established in China by a host Chinese HEI/ provider in cooperation with a foreign partner HEI/ provider. This joint programme is affiliated with the host Chinese HEI/ provider. It operates mainly in two campus models (e.g. ‘1+3’, ‘2+2’, ‘3+1’, and ‘4+0’) and confers Chinese students with double/ joint degrees if the programme is at undergraduate level or above. There are currently 1052 degree-awarding Sino-foreign joint programmes, such as the Bachelor’s Programme of Science in Accounting jointly run by Wenzhou University, China, and Kean University, USA.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hu & Willis (2016, p.256)

Liu (2016) observed that there are three types of Sino-foreign cooperative programmes in the Chinese context, namely, the grafted-model programmes (*jiajie xing*), transplanted-model (*yizhi xing*), and the mixed-model (*hunhe xing*). Specifically, the grafted-model programmes refer to the type of programmes in which students complete the Chinese teaching tasks in China first, then transfer the credits to foreign cooperative universities to
complete their programmes. Students can either complete their studies abroad and obtain a degree, or complete part of their studies abroad and then transfer the credit back to China. After completing their studies in China, they will receive diplomas and degrees from both partners. Often, this type of programmes are run in the forms of ‘1+1’, ‘2+2’, ‘4+2’, ‘4+1’, ‘3+2’. Within this type of cooperation, both the Chinese and foreign parties remain independent from each other and have their own teaching and learning models and quality control methods. The Chinese partners remain focused on their own original curriculum and there is little cooperation in terms of school administration or curriculum and teaching materials development. Apart from providing English language training programmes, it is hard to say whether this type of cooperation has involved meaningful importation of foreign education resources.

The transplanted model refers to the category of programmes which again can be broken down into ‘partially transplanted’ and ‘entirely transplanted’ models. ‘Partially transplanted’ means that the programmes are mainly based on domestic curricula but have assimilated at least one-third of the core courses from the foreign partner. These core courses and partial English language courses are taught by fly-in and fly-out foreign teachers. The term ‘entirely transplanted’ refers to programmes in which the preliminary fundamental plan is provided by the foreign partner. On this basis, the two partners discuss and make appropriate revisions. Generally, only necessary changes are made to some of the curriculum and textbook selections that involve studies of the Chinese nation and politics. Teachers are authorised by the foreign partner or trained to teach using a foreign language.

The term ‘mixed model’ refers to a combination of the grafted and transplanted models. In this type of programme, students study in the partially or entirely transplanted programmes
in the first three years and transfer to the foreign partner institution to complete the courses to earn a foreign degree or a degree from both sides.

The above presentation helps to provide a basic understanding of what transnational higher education means and what the forms of transnational higher education partnerships are. Since this study is focused on transnational higher education in China, it is deemed necessary to review the historical development of transnational higher education in China to help inform the context that this case study was designed against.

2.2.2 Historical Development of Transnational Higher Education in China

In the Chinese context, ‘transnational higher education in China’ is expressed as *zhongwai hezuo banxue* (Sino-foreign/ Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools, CFCRS). Literally, it means joint cooperation with foreign partners in setting up programmes or institutions to deliver education service within the territory of China mainly to Chinese citizens (Fang, 2012; Lin and Liu, 2009).

Although the term *zhongwai hezuo banxue* was coined after the emergence of Chinese-foreign cooperative partnership programmes and institutions in the 1980s, historically, China already had deep roots in engaging with foreign education cooperation activities. The academies established during the Westernisation Movement (*Yangwu Yudong*) (1860s-1890s) are good examples. More than 100 years ago during the late Qing period, advanced Chinese intellectuals realized the importance of strengthening the country through science and technology. Faced with the national crisis in the time of Western country’s invasion, they initiated the foundation of higher education academies to learn from Western academia. At that time, the governing principle of these academies was ‘*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*’, which meant ‘using Chinese models of learning as a fundamental
structure and the Western learning for practical use’. In addition, it was documented that the major subjects included foreign language study, military technology, military studies, and industry and commerce (Cheng, 2014).

China’s higher education suffered under the ten-year Cultural Revolution, during which many higher education activities were shut down. It was not until the introduction of the Reform and Opening-up policy that China’s transnational higher education entered into a new, and more welcoming stage of development (Huang, 2003). Over the past 40 years, transnational higher education in China has experienced an ascending spiral process of development. According to Wang (2005), Ong and Chan (2012) and Cheng (2014), the development of transnational higher education can be categorised into three stages: the exploratory stage (1978-1995), the transitional stage (1996-2003), and the progressive stage (2004-present).

**The exploratory stage (1978-1995)**

The exploratory stage started from 1978 after the introduction of the historic economic reforms and openness (also often referred to as the aforementioned ‘Reform and Opening-up’ policy) led by the political leader Deng Xiaoping. The Reform and Opening-up policy was characterized by the de-collectivization of agriculture, openness to foreign investment, and the decentralization of government controls in the industrial sector, which reopened the door of China’s higher education to the outside world. During this stage, higher education was regarded as a high priority by the state. Many Chinese students and scholars were sent to study overseas and an increasing number of transnational higher education programmes were prepared as a means of supplying the country with professionals and new technologies to achieve its political aim, i.e. the ‘Four Modernizations’ (Modernization of Industry, Modernization of Agriculture, Modernization of National Defence, and Modernization of Science and Technology) (Ong and Chan, 2012).
However, it is noted that at this stage, transnational higher education activities were primarily concentrated on short-term training courses or joint programmes on a limited range of subjects (e.g. economics, law, and foreign languages). Major foreign partner countries included the US, Japan, Germany, France, and the UK. Programmes and institutions established during that time included training programmes between the People’s University of China and Fudan University, the Beijing Centre for Japanese Studies by Beijing Foreign Studies University and the Japan Foundation, and the Sino-American Centre jointly run by Nanjing University with John Hopkins University, to name but a few. It was estimated that only 70 partnership programmes and institutions had been established by the end of 1994 (Xue, 2017).

The transitional stage (1996-2003)

China’s entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) marked a new era for its transnational higher education. China was encouraged to open its transnational higher education market to a much greater degree and since that, it expanded rapidly (Matross Helms, 2008). During this stage, more and more foreign institutions started to pour into the country, collaborating with local institutions to set up partnership programmes and institutions.

In 2003, the government’s first formal policy legislation on Sino-foreign higher education cooperation, entitled Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Sino-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (hereafter referred as the Regulations) was published in respond to the rapid development in this sector. Significantly, the Regulations clearly stated that the overall objective of Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools was to ‘promote overall development in education’. Moreover, it also emphasised that Sino-foreign higher education partnerships should not seek profits (Qin, 2009). The
The promulgation of the *Regulations* indicated that China’s transnational higher education had entered into a formal legislative era (Cheng, 2014). After 2003, more specific regulations, including the *Implementation Methods for Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Chinese-foreign cooperation in Running Schools* (2004), *Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Some Issues concerning Current Sino-foreign Cooperative Education in Running Schools* (2006-2007), and the *Notice on the Quality Assessment of Sino-foreign Cooperative Education in Running schools* (2009) were issued to keep abreast of further developments in this sector.

By the end of 2002, the number of Sino-foreign partnership programmes and institutions had risen to 712, spreading across 23 cities, provinces or autonomous regions of the country (Zhang and Li, 2010). In 2004, a total number of 7,549 students were enrolled in transnational higher education programmes at undergraduate level (Tan, 2006).

**The progressive stage (2004-present)**

Sino-foreign cooperation in higher education entered into a rapid stage of progression in 2004. Its progressive development since then cannot be separated from the favourable political environment supported by the national government. For example, the *2003-2007 Action Plan for Revitalising Education* renewed by the State Council encouraged a higher level of market openness and more intensified international cooperation and exchange for Sino-foreign higher education cooperation. In order to supplement the implementations of the *Regulations*, the government released *Implementation Methods for Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* (hereafter referred as the *Implementation Methods*) which specified details on how to set up, operate, and supervise Sino-foreign cooperation programmes and institutions. Interestingly, since then, the government has loosened the specification on profit-making, indicating that reasonable financial benefits are allowed. This is likely to have significantly boosted
education partners’ engagement in Sino-foreign cooperation activities thereafter. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education (2018), up to September 2018, the number of Sino-foreign partnership programmes and institutions formally approved by the Ministry of Education at the undergraduate level has grown to 1000, consisting of 70 partnership institutions and 930 programmes. The table below provides a summary of the number of these partnerships and their distributions at the undergraduate level. However, the information platform for the supervisory works on CFCRS shows that already 5 CFCRS institutions and 160 CFCRS programmes have ceased their operations, which proves that transnational higher education partnerships can be a risky venture.
Table 2-3 Distribution of 'Approved' CFCRS Institutions and Programmes in China, Undergraduate Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provinces/ municipality</th>
<th>CFCRS Institution</th>
<th>CFCRS Programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongqing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangsu</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhejiang</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangdong</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hainan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fujian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shandong</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangxi</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anhui</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebei</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubei</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaan’xi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanxi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbin</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaoning</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jilin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangxi</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yunan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guizhou</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gansu</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neimenggu</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
<td><strong>930</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After 40 years of continued development, Sino-foreign partnership programmes and institutions have become an integral part of China’s higher education system (Huang, 2006). According to the literature, Sino-foreign partnerships have demonstrated these following features:

1) In terms of the degree levels of transnational higher education programmes, the undergraduate programmes constitute the majority (71.6%), followed by Master’s (27.6%) and Ph.D. programmes (0.8%) (Fang 2012). In terms of degree programmes, the most sought-after subjects are business-related (42.7%) such as management, accounting, and finance, IT (12%), engineering (11.3%), and medicine (5.6%) (Fang 2012);

2) Geographically, transnational higher education programmes and institutions in China are concentrated in the economically and culturally well-developed eastern coastal provinces (e.g. Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shandong) or large and medium-sized cities (e.g. Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai) (Yang, 2008; Hou, Montgomery and McDowell, 2014).

3) China’s foreign partner institutions are from economically developed countries or regions (He, 2016; Hou et al., 2014), such as the UK, the USA, Russia, Germany, Hong Kong, Canada, and France.

**2.2.3 Major Motives for Transnational Higher Education in China**

Given the rapid growth of transnational higher education in China, a question is posed: what has motivated the rapid development of transnational higher education in China during the past 40 years? This question has been discussed by higher education scholars (e.g. Hou et al., 2014; Yang, 2008; Fang & Wang, 2014) who suggested that this phenomenon can be explained from the perspectives of the Chinese government, Chinese higher education institutions and higher education market simultaneously.
Undoubtedly, the rapid development of transnational higher education could not have occurred without the Chinese government’s political support. With the growing influence of China as the world’s second largest economy, the Chinese government has also paid close attention to improving higher education, hoping to build more high-quality universities and internationalise its higher education (Mok and Xu, 2008; Mok, 2014). The Chinese government considers transnational higher education to be a means of enhancing national higher education competitiveness on the global stage by assessing advanced education resources and ideas from foreign countries (Yang 2008; Huang 2007; Lin, 2016). In addition, transnational higher education can help to produce quality graduates who can speak international languages with the intercultural skills and knowledge to support Chinese society’s economic growth.

From the perspective of Chinese higher education institutions, engaging in transnational partnerships has many benefits. For example, it can help to raise the reputation of the institution by establishing links with foreign higher education partners. With increased globalisation in higher education, more and more Chinese universities have begun to pay attention to internationalisation and how to increase their domestic and global image/ranking. Setting up transnational partnerships is also a way of recruiting more students and bringing more economic benefits for the university.

Transnational partnership programmes and institutions have catered not only to the needs of Chinese students but their parents as well. The rapid growth of the Chinese economy has generated a growing number of middle-class Chinese parents in the past decades who are now able to afford to send their children to study overseas (Altbach, 2009). These parents believe that sending children to study overseas will be a great opportunity for them to enhance their chances to secure a better place in the job market (Fang and Wang, 2014). However, the problem is that most Chinese students start university at the early age of 17
years old. Many parents believe it would be more appropriate to let their children study in China first so that they can be better prepared psychologically and academically before sending them overseas (Hou, Montgomery and Mc Dowell, 2011). As such, transnational higher education has become an attractive alternative for Chinese parents and students.

2.2.4 Sino-UK Transnational Partnership Institutes

This study is focused on transnational higher education in China from the perspective of an importer country. More specifically speaking, it is focused on the transnational higher education in the form of joint institutes (in other words, second-tier colleges) between China and the UK. Originally, I was interested in researching international branch campuses in China, i.e. Sino-foreign cooperative universities such as the University of Nottingham, Ningbo, Xi’an Jiaotong Liverpool University, and Shanghai New York University. However, it is notable that in terms of numbers, there are far fewer Sino-foreign cooperative universities compared to second-tier colleges. As is described in Chapter 4 in the section related to the sampling of the case study institution, I encountered some challenges in securing permission from Sino-foreign cooperative universities. Because of this, the focus of the study shifted to transnational partnership second-tier colleges which in this thesis are termed as transnational partnership institutes.

This study is focused on transnational partnership institutes between China and the UK. The UK is one of the leading transnational higher education exporter countries in the world as well as one of China’s top transnational partner countries. According to a recent survey by the British Council (2017), the number of Sino-UK partnership programmes at undergraduate level and above in operation has reached 252, making up 23% of all Sino-foreign partnerships at this level. Compared to the partnership programmes, the number of partnership institutions is far less. The latest statistic of the MOE (2018) shows that there
are 17 Sino-UK partnership institutes in operation, which account for 25% of the national total at this level. Table 2.3 provides a summary of these partnership institutions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year of initial student intake</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun Wah International Business School, Liaoning University</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Shenyang, Liaoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrey International Institute, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Dalian, Liaoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sino-British College, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai International College of Fashion and Innovation, Donghua University</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubei University-University of Central Lancaster (HBU-UCLan) School of Media, Communication and Creative Industries</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Baoding, Hebei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangor College, Central South University of Forestry and Technology</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Changsha, Hunan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Medical University-The Queen’s University of Belfast Joint College</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Shenyang, Liaoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of International Media, Communication University of China</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanjing University of Information Science and technology (NUIST)-Reading Academy</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Nanjing, Jiangsu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham Institute of Fashion and Creative Art, Wuhan Textile University</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Wuhan, Hubei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nankai University-University of Glasgow Joint Graduate School</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Tianjin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancaster University College at Beijing Jiaotong University</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Institute of Nanjing Tech University and the University of Sheffield, Nanjing Tech University</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Nanjing, Jiangsu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhejiang University (ZJU)- University of Edinburgh (UoE) institute</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Haining, Zhejiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow College, University of</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Chengdu, Sichuan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of the programmes, these 17 Sino-UK joint institutes provide a total number of 58 programmes across 9 disciplines: engineering (23.40%), management (10.17%), art (9.16%), economics (5.9%), science (4.7%), medicine (3.5%), literature (2.3%), agriculture (1.2%), and law (1.2%) (British Council, 2017).

Given that transnational higher education in China has achieved such tremendous progress over the last 40 years, it is important that researchers pay more attention to Sino-foreign transnational partnerships, especially on the issues of quality and quality assurance. This is because ultimately quality is the lifeline of the sustainable development of Sino-foreign partnership institutions and programmes (Lin, 2010). Furthermore, more research should be done on Sino-UK partnerships to fill the gap because a review of the literature shows that existing research is predominantly focused on Sino-Australian transnational partnerships (Coleman, 2003; Wang and Moore, 2007; Mok and Xu, 2008; Pyvis, 2011; Cuiming, Feng and Henderson, 2012).

Due to the fact that this study is a case study of Sino-UK transnational partnership institutes, the quality assurance regulatory contexts for Sino-UK transnational higher education partnerships will be discussed in the next section.
2.3 Quality Assurance in Sino-UK Transnational Higher Education

2.3.1 China’s Quality Assurance Regulatory Context for Transnational Partnerships

China and the UK have very different education systems and traditions and as such are governed by very different regulations and procedures for quality assurance regarding transnational partnerships. In China, the government remains the highest level of authority for quality assurance in Sino-foreign higher education partnerships. In order to regulate and standardize the quality of transnational partnerships, since 2003, the Chinese government has issued a series of policy regulations and legislation, including the aforementioned the Regulations (2003), the Implementation Methods (2004) and the subsequent policies, such as Advice of the Ministry of Education in Some Issues concerning Current Sino-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (2006) (hereafter the Advice) and the Notice on the Assessment of Sino-foreign Cooperation Education (2009) (hereafter the Notice).

According to Qin (2009, p.55), the overall policy objectives in the Regulations and the Implementation Methods can be summarized into the so-called ‘six encouragements’ as China encourages the introduction of high-quality foreign education resources, international cooperation in higher education and vocational education, Chinese universities and colleges to partner with their prestigious foreign counterparts, Chinese educational institutions to partner with foreign ones whose academic level and education quality have been widely recognised, international cooperation with newly-emerging participants and sectors in urgent need of such cooperation; finally, international cooperation in the western provinces as well as in remote and impoverished regions. In addition, the Advice (2006) emphasizes that Sino-foreign partnership programmes or
institutions must ensure that the prevailing academic standards are equal to or exceed those of the foreign degree-awarding higher education institutions (MOE, 2006, Article 4). All of these specifications have demonstrated the Chinese government’s determination to import advanced education resources as a practical and effective method to enhance the competitiveness of national higher education on the global stage (Xiao and; Zhang, 2017), and Chinese government’s ambition to transform the country from an economic power to a power with rich human resources (Mok and Yu, 2011, p.241).

Many scholars (e.g. Lin and Liu, 2009; Lin, 2012; Mok, 2014) have suggested that the fundamental guideline for quality assurance in Sino-foreign transnational partnerships is to introduce advanced education resources from the foreign partner institutions. This is evidenced in the policy documents that the government has issued. For example, in the Advice (2006), the government introduced an infamous rule called the ‘Four One Third Rule’ which has quantitatively specified the proportion of the imported foreign education resources. The original statements of the ‘Four One Third Rule’ are as follows:

The introduced foreign courses and the core courses of specialities shall be more than one third of the whole courses and the core courses of the Sino-foreign cooperative education project. The number of the core courses of specialities by teachers from the foreign educational institution and the relevant teaching hours, shall be more than one third of all the courses numbers and teaching hours of the Sino-foreign cooperative education project (Ministry of Education, 2006).

It shows that the government’s emphasis on introducing foreign education resources is primarily focused on curriculum and course materials as well as the foreign teachers’ input.
It is suggested that this rule has become a key reference point for the new programme approval, programme daily quality monitoring and quality evaluation of Sino-foreign transnational partnerships (Cheng, 2014). However, Cheng (2014) pointed out there is ambiguity in the specific meaning of ‘One Third Rule’. For example, he suggested that it is not clear whether the courses taught by the foreign teachers refer to the so-called ‘imported courses’ or the ‘Chinese local courses’.

Apart from issuing policy regulations, the government has also built an online information platform of Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools to monitor transnational higher education partnerships and facilitate information sharing the latest developments in partnership provisions. Although the government has made efforts to achieve this through policy and regulations which focus on the establishment and administration of transnational partnerships, it is noted that there is still no special scrutinization or evaluation system to check or supervise the established joint programmes and institutions (Lin and Liu, 2007; Xiao and Zhang, 2017).

Having looked at the details of the external national quality assurance regulatory context of Sino-foreign transnational partnerships in China, it is important to note that at the same time, at the institutional level, Chinese higher education institutions also have established internal quality assurance mechanisms. These can be characterized as follows:

- ‘Establishment of semi-independent or institution-affiliated teaching evaluation centres responsible for the development and operation of internal quality assurance;
- Recruitment of experienced and retired teaching supervision/steering groups for classroom observation and quality improvement;
- Engagement of on-site peer review for classroom observation and teaching feedback;
• Administration of student survey through questionnaires, individual/group interview, and student representative reports;
• Preparation for annual quality assurance institutional self-review report;
• Construction of teacher training opportunities including pre-and-in service training programmes, especially for all new faculty members’ (Ding, 2008; Li et al., 2008, cited in Chou, 2016, p. 283).

2.3.2 UK’s Transnational Higher Education and Quality Assurance Regime

The UK has very different education systems compared to Chinese higher education. Unlike Chinese universities, UK higher education institutions are autonomous and have independent degree-awarding rights (Harvey and Newton, 2007). This can be traced to higher education reform in the 1980s when the UK government decided to cut public funding to higher education institutions (Harvey, 2005). This external social change led to UK higher education institutions aiming to increase their financial opportunities in the student market in order to survive and thrive.

Having recognised the great financial potential in the global market, UK higher education institutions started to engage in transnational partnership activities by providing services to millions of foreign students unwilling or unable to travel to the UK to study (Healey, 2013). It seems that UK transnational higher education received political support from the UK government as the Minister for Universities and Science emphasised that:

Demand for higher education is growing worldwide…Increasingly, emerging economies want to educate their students at home, and the UK—a global pioneer in developing educational facilities— is well placed to
help… This is one of Britain’s great growth industries of the future (Willetts, 2012, cited in Healey, 2013, p.7).

What I am arguing here is that there is an economic starting point in the UK’s transnational higher education expansion. Indeed, Hou, Montgomery and McDowell (2014) have also found that UK higher education institutions are motivated by the financial gains that transnational higher education can potentially bring. In a sense, the programmes that the UK universities set up overseas can be interpreted as products or services that they sell to local students.

Meanwhile, it seems that UK higher education’s social changes have led to the shaping of the current standard-based ‘evaluative’ quality assurance regulatory system (Harvey, 2002; Harvey and Newton, 2004; Lucas, 2014). Because students are now paying tuition fees for their education, the public is more likely to demand that UK higher education institutions ensure that quality is well-maintained. In response to this demand for accountability, it appears that UK higher education institutions borrowed managerial ideas originating from business and industry to manage quality by means of measuring and controlling academic standards. Common quality assurance activities used in UK higher education institutions include quality accreditation, quality auditing, assessment, and external standards monitoring (Harvey and Newton, 2004) to ensure that requirements are met. It is a way to protect the university’s reputation and legitimacy.

In the UK, the current public quality organisation is called the British Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) which is entrusted by the UK government to monitor quality in UK higher education provisions. According to QAA’s official website (QAA, 2018), the purpose of QAA is to ‘safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is delivered around the world and check that students working towards a UK
qualification get the higher education they are entitled to expect’. This means that QAA also requires UK higher education institutions to pay attention to quality assurance in their transnational provisions which involve degrees awarded from the UK home institution. This point has been clearly emphasised in the policy regulation published by the QAA, the Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education (2010):

The underpinning principle of collaborative provision is that the awarding institution is responsible for the academic standards and quality of learning delivered on its behalf wherever this takes place and by whomever this is undertaken. The awarding institution is responsible for the academic standards of any awards granted in its name (whether these are academic credit or qualifications), as well as for the accuracy of any transcript summarising these. (QAA, p.4)

Under this circumstance, many UK higher education institutions nowadays have also established internal quality assurance mechanisms and promulgated relevant institutional quality assurance rules and regulations to meet the demands of external quality accountability. The UK home institution in this case study is an example. It has its own quality assurance centre which focuses on quality issues in academic programmes, not only domestically but also overseas.

To sum up, this section has discussed the current situation of both China and the UK’s higher education systems as well as their national quality assurance regulatory systems. The two countries have strikingly different education traditions and systems of quality assurance. In China, the Ministry of Education plays the dominant role in regulating quality assurance in transnational higher education. In the UK, higher education
institutions have to comply with policy regulations from the public organisation QAA. The difference in the two systems highlights the challenges in ensuring quality in a Sino-UK transnational partnership when the two education systems attempt to meet. What would happen? How do the key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in the partnership? How do the two partners negotiate? Are there any compromises that have to be made in order to resolve the tension? There is a lack of understanding concerning these issues. Thus, this study aims to explore how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in a Sino-UK transnational partnership to fill this research gap.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter describes the research context of this study in relation to transnational higher education in China. Over the past four decades, transnational higher education in China has achieved encouraging progress with so many partnership programmes and institutions having been established. Among all the Sino-foreign partnerships, Sino-UK transnational partnerships have an important status given the number and the size of the programmes and institutions, and thus deserve more attention from the researchers. The description of the Chinese and UK national quality assurance regulatory contexts has highlighted the problem in ensuring quality in Sino-UK transnational partnership. The next chapter concentrates on the theoretical foundation of this study in relation to stakeholders’ engagement in quality assurance in transnational higher education.
Chapter 3 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical overview of the selected literature, which sets up a conceptual framework informing the research on stakeholder engagement in quality assurance in the context of transnational higher education. It is comprised of three major sections. Section 3.2 reviews the concept of quality and quality assurance from both the Western and Chinese higher education perspectives to explore the meanings of quality and quality assurance in higher education. In addition, key issues relating to quality in transnational higher education are discussed. Section 3.3 reviews the literature on stakeholders in higher education. It explains who the key stakeholders are in higher education. It also introduces Clark’s (1983) triangle of coordination theory as the theoretical frame for this study to explore how the stakeholders influence quality assurance in a Sino-UK transnational partnership institute. Lastly, the key factors that are critical to the success and sustainable development of transnational partnership are also discussed in Section 3.4.

3.2 Concepts of Quality and Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The focus of this study is on quality and quality assurance in a Sino-UK transnational higher education partnership. Thus, it is deemed important to explore what the concepts of quality and quality assurance mean in higher education in both education contexts. This section concentrates on exploring the meanings of quality and quality assurance in both the Western and Chinese higher education contexts. It starts by tracing the roots of the concept of quality.
3.2.1 The Origin of the Concept of Quality

The concept of quality has been discussed since ancient times among the great Greek philosophers (e.g. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle) with regards to what quality actually is. It was suggested at that time that quality was defined as something excellent (Reeves and Bednar, 1994). However, no clear specification was given on what excellence in quality really meant. In other ancient civilisations, for instance, Egypt, quality was associated with perfection, such as zero defects in the construction of the foundation of the pyramids (Elshennawy, 2004). Moving towards medieval times (around 14th -15th century), the concept of quality acquired new meanings. It was used in the field of craftsmanship to refer to skilled craftsmen in the Guilds who produced handmade craft with a certain level of quality as judged by the masters. However, it was also suggested that the meaning of quality was vague (Shanfari, 2016). Quality was in the hand of the individuals and no specific criteria were prescribed for its evaluation.

Such roots created a foundation for understanding this concept. It was found that later on that the meaning of quality had evolved with the social changes during the Industrial Revolution era when mass production emerged in the manufacturing sector. Due to the fact that the manufacturers wanted to make sure their products conformed to industrial standards, quality became associated with the idea of fitness for purpose with a focus on controlling and monitoring manufacturing standards (Shewhart, 1931; Crosby, 1979; Deming, 1986; Feigenbaum, 1983). Meanwhile, it was found that scholars also began to understand quality from the perspective of the consumers. For example, Feigenbaum (1983) explicitly suggested that quality should meet the expectations of customers. Thus, he added the element of customer satisfaction to the definition of quality. This view had been shared by other scholars such as Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) and Grönroos (1990) as well who emphasized the value of customer satisfaction in quality. To summarise, it
seemed that after entering into the late 20th century, the notion of quality was associated with the business and industrial ideas of conformance to specified standards and the experience of customer satisfaction.

**3.2.2 Conceptualization of Quality in Higher Education: from both Western and Chinese Perspectives**

A review of the Western literature suggests that the concept of quality in higher education is complex. There is no a one-size-fits-all definition of quality. According to Harvey and Green (1993), the reason for this is because quality is a relative concept, and that different groups of stakeholders in higher education have different priorities and therefore focuses of quality. For example, the focus of the government might be on the outcomes of university performance, while the focus of attention for the university managers and teachers might be on the institution’s strategic development and the processes of education.

In Western literature, perhaps the most-cited and comprehensive definition of quality is Harvey and Green’s (1993) model of quality consisting of quality as *exception, perfection or consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation*. Quality as *exception* is the traditional approach to quality (Green, 1994). It associated quality as something excellent and distinctive. This was often used to refer to elite universities such as Oxford and Cambridge both in terms of the special education experience that they provide, and in terms of the graduate attributes and research output. It captures the excellence and distinctiveness characteristics of quality. Quality as *perfection or consistency* relates quality to the notion of ‘zero defect’ which means that everything is correct and there are no faults. This perspective of quality seems to have originated from the industrial setting in light of the literature review in Section 3.2.1. Quality as *fitness for purpose* relates quality to the purpose of a product or service. Quality is judged in terms of
the extent to which the product or service fits its purpose. Thus, a quality product is the one that meets customer specifications. This concept of quality is welcomed by policy makers and the government, who expect universities to develop in accordance with broad national goals and the university’s function in supporting societal development. Hence, this notion of quality involves universities clarifying the purpose of higher education. *Quality as value for money* is associated with the idea of ‘you get what you pay for’. In this definition, students are assumed to be the customers of higher education. Thus, quality is associated with the notion of ‘market’ and customer interests. The level of customer satisfaction becomes an indicator of quality. Lastly, *quality as transformation* equates quality with student transformative development during their education experiences. This definition of quality is believed to be the most appropriate definition of quality by educationalists (e.g. Harvey, 2006; Cheng 2011; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003; Carmichael, et al., 2001) who believe the essence of education should focus on empowering the students. Harvey and Green’s (1993) model of quality has demonstrated that the concept of quality is very complex and has different meanings from different perspectives.

Similarly, Cheng & Tam’s (1997) model also suggested that the concept of quality is complex. Their model of quality consisted of seven perspectives, namely, *quality as goals and specifications; the resources input; the process, the satisfaction; the legitimacy, the absence of problems, and the organisational learning*. Compared to Harvey and Green (1993), Cheng and Tam’s (1997) model seems more explicit in terms of the various issues that emerge in higher education. For example, *quality as goals and specifications* is related to the institution’s goals and specifications. *Quality as the resources input and the process* emphasizes the importance of resources and input as well as the process to the achievement of quality; *quality as satisfaction* is similar to Harvey and Green’s (1993) *quality as value for money*, both of which are concerned with customer expectations. In particular, *quality as legitimacy* refers to higher education managers’ concerns about protecting their
institution’s reputation and legitimate status in a context of increased higher education market competition. This applies to some Western countries such as the US, UK and Australia where universities have to compete for external resources and finance due to a decline in public funding (Cheng and Tam, 1997; Harvey, 2005).

Conceptualisations of quality are in fact grounded in relevant philosophical underpinnings. For example, the definitions of quality as consistency, fitness for purpose, and goals and specifications share the same emphasis on aligning with pre-established specifications and standards. These notions of quality are in accordance with the industry-born managerial philosophical belief which currently prevails in the UK higher education system (Brennan and Eagle, 2007; Houston, 2007). In literature, this managerial philosophical idea is termed as ‘Total Quality Management’ (TQM). As mentioned before (See Chapter 2), the current UK higher education system is highly influenced by the TQM philosophical belief that universities should place a heavy emphasis on measuring, monitoring and controlling academic standards. This business-like approach to quality is rooted in the industry-born Total Quality Management theory. Within a TQM model, it is assumed that quality in higher education can and should be measured through conforming to pre-defined academic standards (Dill, 1995; Harvey, 1995). Guided by this philosophical belief, in practice, the UK higher education quality assurance system places a high emphasis on the processes and systems of quality in relation to accountability and compliance (Harvey, 2005). For example, common practices of quality assurance adopted by UK higher education institutions include quality evaluation, peer visits, quality monitoring, and quality audits which all place emphasis on measuring, controlling, and reviewing. Some authors such as Gosling & D’ Andrea (2010) even described this phenomenon as the ‘quality industry’ to stress how overwhelmingly the UK higher education has been influenced by business and industrial ideas. Although this approach to quality may provide a pragmatic strategy for policymakers or higher education managers to manage quality through controlling
academic standards, educationalists such as Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2003) and Harvey and Newton (2004) made the point that the industry-born quality approach places too much emphasis on processes and systems while failing to engage with transformative teaching and learning. They argued that it is not appropriate to equate the process of education with manufacturing products in business and factories.

The definition of quality as transformation is related to the theory of transformative learning (Cheng, 2011). This definition focuses on student-centred pedagogical learning processes with the added value to the learner as a consequence of the learning process. This includes not only developing student knowledge and self-confidence but their abilities to critically question and analyse what is happening in society.

In addition, there is an increasing body of literature (e.g. Anderson, 2006; Kleijnen et al., 2011; Ntim, 2014; Cardoso, Rosa and Stensaker, 2015) pertaining to quality culture as well highlighting the importance of nurturing a communicative, participatory and supportive institutional work environment for academics. For example, Cardoso, Rosa and Stensaker (2015, p.956) highlighted that quality culture is comprised with a cultural/structural element (shared set of values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality) and a structural/managerial element (structures, processes and processes). These studies contribute to our understanding of the barriers or obstacles to quality improvement in empirical studies.

The above presentation of the various definitions of quality demonstrates that it is a highly complex concept which can be conceptualized according to the focuses of the beholders. In addition, these varying conceptualizations of quality have reflected different philosophical beliefs, which highlights the contested nature of this concept. A series of recent empirical studies (e.g. Iacovidou, Gibbs and Zopiatis, 2009; Vann, 2012; Udam and Heidmets, 2013;
Thian, Alam and Idris, 2016) have suggested that in real practice, different stakeholders have different priorities or interpretations of quality. An example of this can be noted in the study of Udam and Heidmets (2013) when the authors found that the representatives of the different stakeholders (i.e. the state, the market and academia) have different interpretations and expectations of what ‘a good university’ entails. To be specific, the market places an equal importance on input, process and output of quality, whereas the state and academia places more emphasis on processes and inputs but less on output. This indicates that in higher education, the perceptions of quality are related to stakeholders’ role and perspectives. There is a need to understand different key stakeholders’ perceptions of quality in such complex higher education environments.

‘Quality in higher education’ in Chinese is termed as jiaoyu zhiliang. According to the Chinese Education Dictionary, the generic meaning of quality in higher education is the level of higher education and the learning outcome. Ultimately, it is embodied in the quality of the graduates that universities produce (Pan, 2000). The criteria for evaluating quality are the educational goals that different types of Chinese higher education institutions have pre-established. In China, influenced by Marxist education philosophy, the general goal for Chinese higher education institutions is to cultivate in the students a well-rounded person with high intelligence, moral qualities, physical fitness and aesthetic appreciation (Pan, 2000; Wild, 2011).

The Chinese meaning of quality is deeply rooted in the country’s education philosophies and political context. China’s most influential education philosopher, Confucius, believed that education should mould a student into a virtuous person (junzi). There is a humanistic element of morality education in the Confucianism philosophical belief. As described in Chapter 2, Chinese intellectuals started to pay attention to learning from Western technology and science in the late Qing dynasty, which was influenced by the Neo-
Confucianism educational philosophy emerging from Confucianism (Wilson, 1995). In modern China, after the establishment of the socialist People’s Republic of China, the government introduced the education ideas from Marxism, emphasizing that education should develop students into all-rounded talents who are not only equipped with high intelligence and professional skills, but also equipped with high moral principles, and physical and mental health. In a word, the core of Chinese understanding of quality is focused on students’ overall development.

In the context of Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools, the concept of quality seems to been attached with new meanings. The government encourages national higher education institutions to introduce advanced education resources and practices from the foreign partner. There is also a high social expectation on Sino-foreign partnership institutions to develop students into international talents to meet the societal and economic development demands. For example, Jinhui and Mengjin (2016, p.236) define quality in Sino-foreign cooperation as being able to develop students who ‘have international vision, being national competition, being able to fully exercise the talents of individuals, comporting with the needs of social development, and allowing students to achieve clear improvement over their original level’.

To sum up, a review of relevant literature indicates that the concept of quality in higher education is complex, and it has many different meanings according to the perspectives of the different stakeholders. This has highlighted the challenges in ensuring quality in higher education, including transnational higher education. My study concentrates on quality assurance in a Sino-UK transnational partnership. Thus, it is also equally important to review the meanings of quality in the Chinese context.
The review of the meaning of quality in the context of Western and Chinese higher education reveals that the concept of quality is complex and has multiple meanings. It shows that the meaning of quality is relative to the perspective of those who view it, and more importantly depends on the political, social and education contexts of the institution. This study is focused on quality assurance in transnational higher education. The following section reviews the literature on the meaning of quality in transnational higher education based on existing empirical studies.

3.2.3 The Meaning of Quality in Transnational Higher Education

In transnational higher education, empirical studies (e.g. Coleman, 2003b; Pyvis, 2011; Lim et al., 2016) have observed that Western higher education exporters tried to ensure quality by controlling academic standards in the local institutions. For example, Pyvis (2011) found that the Australian academic managers used the home programme specifications as single reference points for quality in the Chinese local institutions. He further explained that the reason for this could be attributed to the international guideline for quality in the Provision of Cross-Border Higher Education promulgated by UNESCO (2005) which emphasis the ‘sameness’ and ‘comparability’ in quality. The findings of this study revealed that influences of the prevailing Western managerial quality approach on the conceptualisation of quality for transnational higher education. However, equating quality with ‘sameness’ or ‘comparability’ in academic standards regarding programme specification in the home institution is deemed not to be the most appropriate understanding of quality for transnational higher education (Coleman, 2003b; Pyvis, 2011). As Pyvis (2011, p.741) argued, this approach to quality can easily lead to ‘colonisation masked as imperialism’. It is very likely that the local students’ learning needs will not be considered if the two partners simply copy what the home institution is doing without taking into account the local context.
The existing literature discussed previously shows that in transnational higher education, there is a predominant approach used in transnational partnership to ensure quality which focuses on controlling academic standards to achieve ‘sameness’ or ‘comparability’ in academic standards. This is to meet the quality accountability demands of the foreign degree-awarding institution.

3.2.4 Quality Assurance or Quality Enhancement?

The concept of quality assurance is closely interrelated with the concept of quality. Yet, researchers believe that they are two separate concepts. Harvey (2006) suggests that the difference between concept of quality and quality assurance is conceptually similar to that between the concept of intelligence and IQ tests. The latter is designed to measure the former. In other words, Harvey (2006) believes that quality assurance is the methodology of checking the quality of a process or outcomes of higher education. Other scholars have also attempted to define quality assurance. Vlăsceanu, Grünberg and Pârlea (2007) conceptualise quality assurance as a regulatory mechanism, stating that the quality assurance regulatory mechanism contains an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating, assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, and improving the quality of higher education institutions or programmes. In addition, Williams (2016, p.97) defines quality assurance as ‘a collection of policies, procedures, systems and practices internal or external to the organisation designed to achieve, maintain and enhance quality’. Although scholars have provided different definitions of quality assurance, it seems that they all agree that it comprises of a comprehensive regulatory framework which ultimately aims to demonstrate and achieve quality of higher education institutions.
There are two major purposes of quality assurance in higher education, namely, accountability and enhancement. ‘A central aspect of accountability is that ‘rendering an account’ of what one is doing in relation to goals that have been set or legitimate expectations that other may have of one’s products, services or processes, in terms that can be understood by those who have a need or right to understand the ‘account’’ (Kris, 2005, p.10), whereas improvement-based quality assurance focuses on promoting further performance rather than control or evaluating quality. The improvement-based quality assurance is often seen as a mechanism to help increase transparency of decision-making processes, develop teaching and learning quality, and hence benefit students and the academic work (Cardoso, Rosa and Stensaker, 2015).

There are three generic approaches to quality assurance as identified by scholars: assessment, accreditation and audit. Kis (2005) points out that the differences among the three approaches can be distinguished by three questions: the audit approach is to answer ‘are your processes effective in achieving your objectives?’; the assessment approach is to answer ‘how good are your outputs?’, and the accreditation approach is to answer the question ‘are you good enough?’. However, research (e.g. Billing, 2004) shows that quality assurance frameworks vary from country to country. This is determined by practical issues, such as ‘the size of higher education sector, the rigidity/ flexibility of the legal expression of quality assurance (or the enshrinement in law), and the stage of development from state control of the sector’ (Billing, 2004, p.113). This means that in a transnational partnership, it is very likely that the two partner countries will have different approaches to quality assurance, which leads to the question of how the two partner institutions resolve the potential competing goals during the partnership.

It is noted that quality assurance is not static but a dynamic developmental process (Goff, 2016). Often, each developmental phase poses its own characteristics, challenges and
paradoxes. Tee Ng (2008) studied the development of quality assurance of primary and secondary education in Singapore and found that quality assurance develops in phases: standardisation, local accountability, and diversity and innovation. Goff (2016) further conceptualises quality assurance as a developmental phase: defending quality, demonstrating quality and enhancing quality. He called for further research to explore the factors that influence quality assurance approaches during the developmental process.

Furthermore, researchers (e.g. Morley, 2001; Skolnik, 2010; Beerkens, 2015) suggest that the nature of quality assurance is political. This is because quality assurance involves decision-making among different groups of stakeholders who may hold competing concepts of quality; moreover, some groups of stakeholders have stronger voices than others (Beerkens, 2015). For instance, in Brady and Bates's (2016) empirical study, they found that the Quality Assurance Agency had a stronger voice than academics in deciding quality assurance approaches. With an overemphasis on accountability and efficiency, the current quality assurance practices have led to a distortion of academic professional practices within the institution. Likewise, Houston and Paewai (2013) highlighted the power struggles among different groups of stakeholders in quality assurance practices. They indicated that quality assurance can be seen as ‘a series of control paths based upon the ability of a decision-taker to alter the funding, reputation or both funding and reputation of other elements within the system’ (Houston and Paewai, 2013, p.270). Brennan and Shah (2000), reinforcing this argument, categorised the main approaches to quality assurance into: academic, managerial, pedagogic, and employment focus based on different ‘quality values’ held by different stakeholders (See Table 3.1).
### Table 3-1 Four Dimensions of Quality Assurance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorisations of quality management approaches</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Managerial</th>
<th>Pedagogic</th>
<th>Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic</strong></td>
<td>Subject focus: knowledge and curricula</td>
<td>Institutional focus: policies and procedures</td>
<td>People focus: teaching skills and methods</td>
<td>Output focus: graduate standards/learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional authority</td>
<td>Managerial authority</td>
<td>Staff training and development</td>
<td>Employment/professional authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality values vary across institutions</td>
<td>Quality values invariant across institutions</td>
<td>Quality values invariant across institutions</td>
<td>Quality values both variant and invariant across institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There has been an ongoing debate concerning the concepts of quality assurance and quality enhancement. As suggested by Williams (2016), ‘quality assurance’ and ‘quality enhancement’ are both umbrella terms for a range of activities. However, the emphases of the two concepts differ. A review of literature on the current definitions of quality assurance and quality enhancement appears to suggest that quality assurance is more linked to the notion of ‘accountability’ by many higher education managers and academics. The purpose of quality assurance is to ensure that higher education reaches pre-established standards, and the focus of quality assurance is on the processes to achieve quality whereas quality enhancement focuses on student learning. In addition, it appears that quality
assurance is presented rather negatively, characterised by inflexibility and quantitative
measurements, whereas quality enhancement is presented more positively and is
characterised by negotiated processes based on qualitative engagement with front-line
academics.

Although the two concepts have distinct differences in their meanings, scholars have also
identified a relationship between quality assurance and quality enhancement. Elassy (2013)
argued that quality enhancement is dependent on quality assurance. Danø and Stensaker
(2007) concluded that quality assurance and quality enhancement are integral parts of the
same process arguably in a cycle with each part informing the next. Supporting this
viewpoint, scholars such as Gosling and D’Andrea (2010b) called for a holistic approach to
quality assurance processes to facilitate the improvement of student learning. What these
scholars indicated was that quality assurance can contribute to the improvement quality
under particular conditions. Coates (2005) and Wang (2014) suggested that it is important
to engage students and staff in the process of quality assurance to enhance quality in
learning.

3.2.5 Issues Relating to Quality in Transnational Higher Education

There are many complex issues relating to quality in transnational higher education when
delivering quality to students in a partnership. These issues include curriculum and course
design, teaching pedagogies in transnational higher education teaching contexts, student
learning styles, student English language skills, teacher qualification and readiness,
assessment methods and standards (Pyvis, 2013). This section reviews the literature and
discusses these key issues in detail.
Curriculum and course materials can be interpreted as the education products that students purchase in transnational higher education. There have been studies documented in some transnational partnership contexts (e.g. Coleman, 2003b; Pyvis, 2011; Lim et al., 2016; Yang, 2006), where the local curriculum and course materials were designed based on the home programme specifications as a reference point with an intention to replicate learning content. It is not surprising to see this phenomenon because there is a predominant philosophical belief in transnational higher education that ‘equivalency’ and ‘sameness’ is equated with quality. Moreover, one option may be to add an ‘international’ element into the courses to develop students’ international capabilities in a transnational higher education context. As a result, transnational higher education partners strive to achieve this by replicating education materials and practices. However, this approach has been criticized by scholars (e.g. Coleman, 2003; Pyvis, 2011) who argued that replication may not be the most appropriate approach to curriculum and course design in the context of transnational partnerships because the Western global curriculum does not necessarily align with the learning needs of local students seeking employment in the domestic market. Yang (2006) reported that students in a transnational programme located in Hong Kong complained that the course content was second-hand, inaccurate and insufficiently adapted to their local society, and therefore failed to provide real life guidance. Leask (2013) believed that curriculum for a transnational context should be both internationalized and localized. According to Leask (2013, p.123), an internationalized curriculum taught in a transnational context must not only recognize the role that culture plays in the construction of knowledge in the discipline and provide students with opportunities to explore the ways in which their own culture and the cultures of others shape knowledge and professional practice internationally, it must do this within the local, transnational context.

The issue of teaching pedagogies in transnational higher education is also closely linked to quality. There is a question which needs to be asked in terms of what type of teaching
pedagogies should be used in transnational partnerships, given the diversity of backgrounds among the teaching academics in this context (Debowski, 2013). Research has shown that Chinese students studying in transnational contexts have different cultural values and learning styles compared to Western students in the home institution (Heffernan et al., 2010). Often, Chinese students are portrayed as passive learners who tend to approach learning by memorisation and rote-learning. In addition, students often perceive their teachers to be authorities on their subjects, and there is a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student (Xiao and Dyson, 1999). Moreover, it is also suggested that the Chinese Confucian value of modesty of behaviour has discouraged students from questioning their teachers in the classroom (Chan, 1999). These issues can all lead to learning challenges for students transitioning into a ‘foreign’ curriculum and teaching styles in transnational partnership programmes. As such, scholars such as Heffernan et al. (2010) and Chapman and Pyvis (2006) have argued that the notion of best teaching practice cannot be fully transplanted from the foreign degree awarding institution to the local one. They suggested that teachers teaching in transnational partnerships should adapt their teaching strategies used for home programme students to cater to the specific learning needs of local Chinese students.

Moreover, students’ linguistic issues have also proven to be one of the key challenges regarding the measurement of quality in transnational partnership programmes (Cuiming, Feng and Henderson, 2012). Many transnational programmes use English as the delivery language for degree courses. However, due to the students’ prior learning experiences, which were largely focused on grammar and reading skills in a teacher-centred classroom, lacking in conversational emphasis and compounded by certain beliefs about language learning instilled during schooling, Asian students in particular found it challenging to use English for academic purposes (Sawir, 2005).
In addition, the issue of teacher quality also requires attention in transnational higher education. Teaching in transnational higher education classrooms is challenging. This is because transnational higher education teaching context is an interface between different cultures, contexts and practices. According to Leask (2013), teachers teaching in transnational context require specific knowledge, skills, and abilities. Teachers not only have to demonstrate professional knowledge of their field, but also be able to understand the contexts and students’ needs and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly. This raises the question of what professional skills and qualifications should be required for teachers in transnational context and what needs to be done to empower teachers to be better prepared for this challenging task. However, many scholars (e.g. Smith, 2009; Dunn and Wallace, 2013; Keay, May and O’Mahony, 2014; Mahony and Academy, 2014) recommended the provision of professional development opportunities to enhance the skills and knowledge of transnational teachers. Smith (2009) found that professional development inspires transnational teachers to help themselves and their peers through reflection and revision of the fundamentals of their teaching, learning and assessment practices.

Developing quality in transnational higher education is by no means an easy task. Kinser & Lane (2013) summarised the key problems that contribute to the challenges of developing quality assurance in transnational higher education. First of all, creating quality assurance regimes for transnational higher education partnerships involves abiding by laws and regulations of both the host and home countries. However, the dilemma is often that the host and home countries have their own rules, the implication being that this may lead to potential conflicts between the two countries from point of view of national quality assurance regulations. This view is also shared by Eldridge & Cranston (2009) who argued that national culture also matters in transnational higher education collaboration. Thus, the first problem is related to the force of the state. The second problem lies in the difficulty in
establishing a threshold of quality in transnational higher education partnership because the concept of quality is notoriously difficult to define, and different models of higher education institutions may have different understandings of quality. This problem is attributed to the human factor in relation to academic managers and teachers within a higher education institution. The third factor stems from market forces. Transnational higher education partners are subject to the pressure of supporting themselves financially. Market forces push transnational higher education institutions to place a heavy emphasis on financial gain through the payment of tuition fees. As such, there is a conflict between achieving quality and maintaining financial growth. In addition, Eldridge & Cranston (2009) believed that challenges also lie in the establishment of rigorous but locally-adapted procedures in transnational partnerships in the host country as well as the difficulty in building trust between transnational partners. To conclude, the forces of the state, academics managers and teachers within the institutions, and the market have contributed to the challenges in ensuring quality in transnational higher education.

3.3 Stakeholders in Higher Education and their Roles in Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is critical to the sustainable development of transnational partnerships. Yet it is also challenging to develop quality assurance effectively in the context of transnational higher education. One of the key reasons for this is that higher education quality assurance systems develop in a highly complex environment in which different stakeholders have different expectations and sometimes even conflicting goals (Beerkens, 2015a). This section focuses on reviewing how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in higher education and analysing the theoretical lens that I decided to adopt for this study.
3.3.1 Who Are the Key Stakeholders in Higher Education?

The term ‘stakeholder’ originally stems from the field of corporate governance in the work of Freeman (1984). He defined a stakeholder as ‘any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives’ (Freeman, 1984, p.46). Based on the initial work of Freeman, scholars have expanded the knowledge on stakeholders in terms of the identification and conceptualisation to understand stakeholders’ role in organisations.

Like any corporate or business organisations, higher education institutions are also involved with many different types of stakeholders who exert influences on daily educational activities. Amaral and Magalhaes (2002, p.2) defined stakeholders in higher education as an ‘individual or collective person with a legitimate interest in higher education that, as such, acquires the right to intervene’. In other words, the term ‘stakeholders’ in higher education refers to any person or group who has an interest in higher education and has influences on how education develops. In addition, they suggested that stakeholders in higher education can be categorised into internal stakeholders and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are members of the academic community within a higher education institution, such as managers, academics and the students; external stakeholders comprise individuals or organisations that have an interest on higher education institution but are not a member of the academic community such as the government, quality assurance agents, parents and employers.

My study concentrates on exploring how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in a transnational higher education partnership. In my study, the key stakeholders refer to those individuals or organisations who are involved in quality assurance processes and have important roles in influencing how quality assurance is
practiced during the partnership. Thus, both external and internal stakeholders are included in this research.

### 3.3.2 Using Clark's (1983) Triangle of Coordination as the Analytical Framework

Clark’s (1983)’s triangle of coordination is applied as the theoretical framework for guiding this study. Clark conceptualised that higher education systems operate in a triangle of coordination model which consists of the state, market and the academic professionals in higher education institutions which he himself termed as ‘academic oligarchy’ (See Figure 3.1). According to Clark, each corner represents an extreme of one force and a minimum of the other two, while locations within the triangle represent combinations of the three forces in different degrees. Based on this, he proposed that there are three extreme models of coordination, bureaucratic and political coordination, professional coordination and market coordination.

![Figure 3-1 Clark's (1983) Triangle of Coordination](image)
In the bureaucratic and political coordination, the state manages the governance of higher education through bureaucratic and political command. According to Clark, there are five pathways of development in a bureaucratically-coordinated higher education system: layering, jurisdictional expansion, personnel enlargement, administrative specialization, and rule expansion. Layering refers to ‘the piling of administrative echelon upon administrative echelon in an unremitting quest for coordination, symmetry, logic and comprehensive order’. Layering makes the administrative pyramid taller. Jurisdictional expansion refers to an increase in the jurisdictional scope of administrative agencies such as ministries of education. Personnel enlargement refers to the increase of administrators in the administrative system. Administrative specialization means an increase in the expertise in administrative work or a shift from amateurs to experts in their field. Lastly, rule expansion refers to an increase in the number and complexity of formal rules designed to guide decisions. Clark described that as a model of bureaucratic coordination, the state influences higher education through ‘a number of strategies (by increasing the number of levels of formal coordination, the jurisdictional scope of administrative agencies, number of administrators, levels of administrative expertise, and number and complexity of rules)’, and in the model of political coordination, the government increases influences by ‘a different set of tactics (by upgrading the political priority of issues related to higher education and political involvement across the sector and by raising standards for university governance)’ (Salazar and Leihy, 2013, p.54).

In professional coordination, knowledge is the authority. Academic authorities can be discipline-rooted with sub-types of personal, collegial, guild and professional authority to be found. Professors and academic professionals in the university faculties or departments can exercise decision-making power on academic issues.
The market coordination consists of three major types of market: the consumer market, the labour market, and the institutional market. The market coordination refers to higher education institutions are influenced by the competition of the market (Ben-David, 1972; Clark, 1983). The competition could include student enrolment, academic labours, and reputation of higher education institutions.

Clark (1983) suggested that these three forces interact with one another, resulting in different levels of influences on higher education. At one time, the influence of the state may be stronger than the market or the professionals and at another time, the influence of the market may grow stronger due to changes of social and economic development. In other words, the relationship of the actors would change but always remain the shape of a triangle. Due to differences in national contexts, the model of coordination varies among different countries. For example, he believed that the state was the strongest force in the Swedish higher education system, whereas the USA was well down, heading towards the market extreme. However, it is important to note that the triangle of coordination is not static but dynamic. In other words, the level of the influences among the three forces will change. This applies to the situation of the UK higher education system. It is suggested that during the past three decades, UK higher education is heading away from the academic oligarchy in a zigzag fashion towards the corners of the state and the market (Brennan, 2010).

Traditionally, higher education has been organized by academic professionals themselves. However, with the change of the external environment, the system of higher education is becoming more and more complex with more forces (e.g. the state and the market) governing higher education, defining and framing activity. The state and the market greatly influence higher education coordination. Typically, the state has conspicuous regulatory powers over higher education systems by imposing norms and regulations and, if not
directing funding, creating the conditions in which it might be pursued (Jongbloed, 2003); whereas, the market facilitates unregulated exchanges among people competing for personnel, clientele, financial resources, and prestige (Clark, 1983, p.168).

For nearly 35 years, Clark’s triangle of coordination theory has been used as a paradigm for describing, assessing and comparing systems of higher education. The contribution of this theory lies in that it helps to conceptualise the complex mechanism of higher education by depicting the interplay/tensions between the three key players, the state, the market and the academic oligarchy. However, like many other theories, this theory also reveals its limitations as higher education evolves. Marginson and Rhoades (2002) argued that this theory does not take into account the influence of global forces in today’s globalised world. What they were suggesting was that in the contemporary globalised society, higher education institutions are influenced by global, national and local forces. For example, some international organisations such as OECD, World Bank, and ENQA can be understood to be a force from a global perspective. Based on this argument, they extended this theory into the notion of ‘glonacal’ which represents a different level of three-dimensional forces consisting of the global, the national, and the local. Salazar and Leihy (2013) moved this theory forward by tracing how each domain (public domain, competition domain, and institutional domain) functions. For example, in the public domain, politics, bureaucracy, and the populace are the key factors that influence higher education coordination. In the institutional domain, the managers, academics, and students are the entities around which university subcultures form (Clark, 1983). In the competition domain, prestige, resources, and placement are the focus of competition in higher education.

Although scholars have developed this theory of coordination in higher education based on their observations on the changes and complexities in higher education, this theory can
additionally be useful as an analytical tool to examine the functioning of the basic forces identified by Clark (Salazar and Leihy, 2013). In the literature of higher education, it was found that this theory has been employed in a number of empirical studies (Suspitsin and Suspitsyna, 2007; Maggio, 2011; Lang, 2015; Sidhu and Christie, 2015). For example, in the transnational higher education context, Sidhu and Christie (2015) studied the dynamic processes of how the global market forces played out in the specific national and institutional context of a Malaysian-Australian joint venture. The authors argued that joint ventures operate in a complex context in which the state and global/local forces interact with each other simultaneously and from multiple directions. In particular, they suggested it is necessary to take local conditions into account.

Clark’s (1983) theory of triangle of coordination is employed in this study as the analytical lens because it offers me a basic frame through which to focus on how the key stakeholders (the state, the market, and academic oligarchy) influence quality assurance in transnational higher education partnerships. Considering that the case study partnership institute is a higher education institution jointly developed between the Chinese parent university and the UK home institution in China, it was very likely that quality assurance in the case study partnership institute was subject to the influences of at least the Chinese government, the Chinese local market and the academic professionals and staff working for this institute. The major purpose of this study is to understand the mechanism of how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in the partnership institute. By adopting Clark’s (1983) triangle of coordination it allows me, as a starting point, to concentrate on investigating the roles of each stakeholder and to examine the interrelations and interactions among each of them.

In addition, I considered Marginson and Rhoades's (2002) notion of ‘glonacal’ as the theoretical framework of this study. As discussed above, the notion of ‘glonacal’ refers to
the simultaneous existence of global, national and local dimensions and forces influencing higher education nowadays in this increasingly globalised world (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002). Marginson and Rhoades’s (2002) ‘glonacal’ conception has extended Clark’s (1983) model by introducing global influences in the neo-liberal era. Marginson and Rhoades’s (2002) notion of ‘glonacal’ may appear to be more suitable for transnational higher education studies because it has incorporated the dimension of global perspective which seems to fit better into this transnational context. However, it is important to be aware that Marginson and Rhoades’s (2002) focus is on global agencies or international policies, national policies and local agencies such as students, faculty or non-faculty professionals and administrators. The glonacal agency heuristic is suitable for tracking the sphere and capacities of international organisations such as World Bank, OECD and networks of professionals. However, an analysis of the data in this study indicates that there was little indication that the global dimension of influence, for instance, global agencies or international polities was prominent in the case study partnership institute’s quality assurance mechanisms. This might be because the present case study partnership institute is a second-tier college which has less impact nationwide or worldwide compared to world-class universities.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that Clark’s (1983) triangle of coordination is not the only fitting model and also that it was not completely helpful in understanding the complexities and dimensions of the context. Specifically speaking, Clark’s (1983) model was only looking at higher education from the system level in one dimension. It did not assist in capturing the dynamics of meso and micro dimensions. Due to the fact that the present case study institute is a transnational partnership, the context was much more complex. As a result, the analysis is on multi-dimensional levels. In other words, my study will not only look at quality assurance at the macro level, examining the influences of the government and the market, but also pay equal attention to the meso and micro levels
exercised respectively by the senior management at the university level and the academic managers, teaching academics, and students at the partnership institute multidimensionally. In particular, the micro level stakeholders’ engagement in quality assurance practices are looked upon carefully to uncover the complexities of assuring quality in transnational higher education partnerships.

3.3.3 Roles of Stakeholders in Higher Education and their Influences on Quality Assurance

Having subscribed to Clark’s (1983) triangle of coordination theory as the analytical lens, this section reviews the literature focusing on the roles of the key stakeholders, namely, the state, the market and the academic oligarchy in quality assurance from both the UK and Chinese higher education contexts.

The government is a key stakeholder of quality assurance in higher education. Its major approach to quality assurance comes through policy instruments such as policy regulations and organisations established for conducting relevant quality assurance activities, e.g. quality assessment, quality monitoring, and quality control (Harman, 1998). Researchers have suggested that the reasons governments care about quality assurance in higher education include the need to encourage academic improvement, protection of consumer interests and equity, the promotion of economic development and equity and the facilitation of regional recognition of qualifications and the mobility of professional labour (Blackmur, 2007; Harman, 1998; Crozier et al., 2005).

The role and the level of influences of government on quality assurance differ in different countries all over the world according to their national education contexts. According to
Dill & Beerkens (2013), the government could exert direct control on academic quality through designing national policy regulatory regimes or by steering towards professional self-regulation. In the former case, the government’s direct regulation on quality can take the form of defining academic standards (e.g. subject benchmarking in the UK), evaluating and enforcing academic standards (e.g. subject assessment or accreditation), or employing legal, financial, and monitoring instruments (e.g. performance-based contracting)’ whereas, in the latter case, it is often carried out by professional organisations (e.g. external examining in the UK and teacher education accreditation council).

Governments typically conceptualise quality in whatever they define as ‘higher education’ in terms of the extent to which minimum performance standards are met in respect of each characteristic of the system that is of interest to them. In Chapter 2, I discussed the Chinese government’s national quality regulatory frameworks for Sino-foreign partnership institutions and programmes. The description suggests that the Chinese government serves as the authority on quality for Chinese transnational higher education provisions. Through promulgating policy instruments, the government has established quality assurance mechanisms for licensing new partnership programmes and the subsequent quality assessment and information sharing activities. In particular, the description of the Chinese government’s policy regulations on new programme approval demonstrates that the government places high emphasis on the performance indicators of new partnerships, encouraging them to have sufficient high-quality resources, infrastructures and facilities as well as foreign teachers’ teaching input.

As I reviewed the UK’s national quality assurance system, it became apparent that the UK government intervenes less on quality assurance compared to the Chinese government. The UK government entrusts the public quality assurance organisation, Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to seek justification for public funding and protect the public interest. The
Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education provides a general guideline for the standards of UK higher education institutions, including transnational provisions. However, literature reported that the UK government’s over-emphasis on quality control has led to a greater burden on academics as well as resistance to quality assurance (Lucas, 2014; Newton, 2002a; Milliken & Colohan, 2004).

Various scholars (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Henderson et al., 2017) have documented the influence of the market in quality assurance in higher education in the era of neoliberalism. Olssen and Peters (2005) commented that increased pressure from the market under the influence of neoliberalism and the associated discourses of new public management have resulted in an institutional stress on performativity, ‘as evidenced by the emergence of an emphasis on measured outputs: on strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits’ (p.313). Indeed, as market competition intensifies in higher education, higher education institutions pay more attention to the institution’s league tables and university rankings in order to attract more student applicants (David & Maarja, 2005). For example, in Rolfe’s (2003) empirical study, he found that all the English case study universities studied placed emphasis on marketing for student recruitment with substantial expenditure while faced with the pressure of competition for students. The university managers also suggested that they aimed to create a brand and pay attention to various aspects of quality services at campus such as accommodation, sports, and leisure activities in order to enhance their position in the league tables. They explained that this was because students and parents relied heavily on league tables and rankings to judge the quality of their university and decide whether they will apply for this university or not.
Students are also an important group of stakeholders in higher education, especially in UK higher education where students are considered to be consumers of higher education who pay for their educational services (Bunce, Baird and Jones, 2016). Thus, student satisfaction has become one of the key quality indicators of university league tables. In the UK, higher education institutions use National Student Survey to gather feedback from students as a means of measuring student satisfaction (Douglas, Douglas and Barnes, 2006). An emphasis on student satisfaction was related to the external higher education competition environment in the UK. In order to attract more students, UK higher education institutions must pay attention to their reputation and ranking (Dill, 2007).

In countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, transnational higher education belongs to the private sector. Market forces have a strong influence in the existence of transnational provisions. China has different conditions in comparison with Malaysia and Singapore. The Chinese government exerts a stronger influence on transnational higher education provisions (Mcburnie and Ziguras, 2001; Mok and Han, 2016). This is related to the centralised system of quality assurance in higher education in China.

In higher education, before the government and the market began to exert an influence on university activities, it was the professionals from departments and faculties who made the decisions about quality, and ensured it through their professional expertise (Salazar and Leihy, 2013). However, more and more literature has appeared documenting how the forces of the government and the market have affected professional autonomy in higher education institutions on quality assurance. For example, Newton (2002b) suggested that, influenced by the ‘new managerialism’ ideology, the UK higher education managers view quality differently to front-line academics. They are wedded to forms of managerialism and accountability. As Newton (2002b, p.47) put it, the higher education managers seek to influence the processes and rituals of external audit and assessment, and to manipulate the
rules of the game, but in so doing they forfeit the prospect of engaging in innovative or quality enhancement-oriented work. However, the findings suggest that under the influence of the managerialism quality assurance system, teaching academics felt that their professional and academic autonomy in terms of curriculum delivery, design, and standards had been threatened (Newton, 2002b, 2002a). As a result, teachers had to conform to the institution’s quality accountability requirements during their daily teaching activities.

The above discussion has highlighted the complexity regarding the roles of the key stakeholders in quality assurance in higher education. The three forces of the state, market and academic oligarchy have different rationales and interests in quality assurance. Given the complexity, it is recommended that an ideal way of developing quality assurance effectively is to design a quality assurance framework that can balance the forces of the varying stakeholders in the higher education system (Dill and Beerkens, 2013). However, little is known about how the forces of the key stakeholders influence quality assurance in transnational partnerships. This study aims to fill this theoretical and empirical gap.

### 3.4 What Makes Transnational Higher Education Partnerships Successful and Sustainable?

There have been many academic discussions concerning the crucial factors which lead to the success of transnational partnership. Based on the experience of Monash University partnering with institutions in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, McBurnie and Pollock (2000) emphasized the importance of effective planning to the success and sustainable development of the partnership. They suggested that effective planning should cover three essential dimensions: namely, university strategy, academic priorities and financial considerations. Specifically speaking, in terms of strategic vision, they suggested
that it is important that the plan of the partnership fits with the strategic development of the university and contributes to the university’s long-term mission; from the perspective of academic priorities, the plan should provide an appropriate learning experience for students and professional development opportunities for staff; and from the business perspective, the plan should be financially viable and sustainable. Transnational partners should be aware of the potential operational opportunities as well as financial failure and reputation damage when drawing up partnership plans during partner selection.

Heffernan and Poole (2004) added that in the early interaction phase, the critical factors which count towards the prevention of the deterioration and termination of the relationship include communication, trust, and a shared vision. In addition, in the later stages, they found that there are four other factors which could lead to the deterioration and termination of the partnership: 1) low levels of internal commitment within the foreign university; 2) a lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the partners; 3) failure to establish win/win relationships; and 4) the withdrawal of key personnel. The importance of communication, trust and relationship commitment has also been stressed by Ahmed, Patterson and Styles (1999) and Hailey (2000).

Furthermore, Butterfield, Tafesse and Moxley (2016) pointed out that during the process of collaboration, one of the challenges in transnational partnerships is the formation of an unequal power dynamic between institutions in developed and developing countries. As Djerasimovic (2014) noted, the term ‘partnership’ implies a degree of equality that often hides a power hierarchy. This is often because the partner from the developed country has a greater advantage in funding, expertise, or political power than their partner in the developing country. Power and authority often lie in the home institution which decides quality, controls academic standards, and designs curriculum and teaching pedagogies (Edwards, Crosling and Lim, 2014). A lack of equality can lead to the weakening of
potential partnerships. Melano et al. (2014, p. 2) argued that the development of successful transnational partnerships requires ‘drawing on the expertise of all of those involved, with the aim of producing both localized and internationally relevant subjects and programmes’. Sharing ideas and practices is important in transnational contexts.

The importance of providing support and professional development has also been highlighted (Smith, 2009; Keevers et al., 2014). It is believed that professional development can motivate teachers to self-reflect on their teaching, thus ultimately improving their teaching practices (Bolam, 2008). Drawing upon her own ‘novice’ transnational teaching experiences and that of the participants, Smith (2009) identified the need of providing fly-in-fly-out transnational teachers with appropriate professional development in order to enhance their teaching practices. This is because there are differences in the teaching environment, culture, and values between the partner institutions. An example of good practice in professional development of transnational teachers has been documented in the Learning and Teaching Unit at the University of South Australia, which provided Australian transnational academics with relevant online materials which could be printed out for use on long flights (Jarrett, 2013).

Moreover, focusing on the perspective of the teachers’ community in transnational higher education, Dunn and Wallace (2005) promoted the idea of Wenger's (2006) communities of practice in improving collegial relationship among the teachers and the quality of teaching practices. The authors proposed providing teachers in transnational contexts with institutional support for the development and maintenance of programme-based inclusive communities of practice. Most importantly, the communities of practices across the diverse educational, cultural and geographic borders can engage in interactive and meaningful dialogues and collaboration. Other scholars such as Keay, May and O’Mahony (2014) also
emphasized that a focus on the quality of the relationship between partners should be encouraged to enhance the quality of learning experiences for students.

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed relevant literature on the key concepts of this study, namely, quality and quality assurance, and discussed key issues related to quality in transnational higher education. In this literature review, the chapter has highlighted the complexities in defining the concept of quality, the relationship between ‘quality assurance’ and ‘quality improvement’, and the issues relating to quality in transnational higher education. The chapter has also discussed the notion of stakeholders in higher education and the theories of stakeholder engagement in higher education. This chapter has constructed the theoretical framework to guide the study and the research design to be adopted. The literature review in this chapter has created the foundation for reference, discussion and interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 5 and 6 and 7. Chapter 4 presents the research methodology and design of this study.
Chapter 4 Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This study is a qualitative single case study underpinned by the interpretivist research paradigm. This chapter details the research methodology and methods used to conduct this study. It includes a discussion of the research design, the data collection process and the analysis, issues of validity and reliability and the limitations of this study. The research methods used in this study are document analysis, semi-structured interviews with UK and Chinese staff, and focus group interviews with local Chinese students. Section 4.3 presents the interpretivist worldview of this study, and Sections 4.4 and 4.5 focus on the research approach and research design. The sampling methods of the case study, the institution and the participants are discussed in Section 4.6. Section 4.7 explains the data collection and analysis procedures, and finally, Section 4.8 provides my reflections on the research process.

4.2 Aim and Research Questions

This study is a single case study which focuses on quality assurance in a Sino-UK partnership institute, a joint venture established between a Chinese parent university and a UK home institution. Specifically, it looks at how the key stakeholders in the partnership influence quality assurance approaches in relation to teaching and learning during the collaboration. The aim of the study is to provide a deep understanding of the complexities involved in ensuring quality in Sino-UK transnational partnerships on the basis of a single case. Specifically, this study examines what positions the two partners take, their national
or institutional approaches to quality assurance, the issues that they deal with relating to quality during the programme design and delivery processes, and the key factors that matter to the effectiveness of quality assurance.

Thus, the main research question of this study is:

- How do different key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in a Sino-UK partnership institution?

Accordingly, four specific questions are developed from the main question:

1. How do the key stakeholders perceive the concepts of quality and quality assurance?
2. What approaches do the key stakeholders use to ensure quality?
3. What roles do the key stakeholders play during the processes of quality assurance practice?
4. What factors influence the key stakeholders’ engagement in quality assurance processes?

4.3 An Interpretivist Worldview

Whether they are aware of it or not, all researchers bring their particular worldviews to their projects. A worldview is ‘a basic set of beliefs that guide action’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.7). It is concerned with two questions: first, what is the nature of reality (which is termed ontology); and second, what do we know and how do we know about reality (i.e. epistemology) (Crotty, 1998; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003)?
A worldview plays an important role in research. Creswell (2014) and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) suggest that researchers need to articulate their worldviews at the outset of their projects because those worldviews can serve as the guide to making coherent, ethical and theoretically informed decisions at every stage of the research process, including the selection of research approaches and specific methods of data collection and analysis. There are many different schools of thought reflecting particular worldviews, such as positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, feminism, and pragmatism (Crotty, 1998). An interpretivist worldview has been adopted for this study.

An interpretivist worldview holds that ‘all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human being practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context’ (Crotty, 1998, p.42). This definition indicates that interpretivism emphasises the idea of knowledge being socially constructed by human minds as they engage in the world they are interpreting. Ontologically speaking, interpretivists believe that the nature of knowledge is subjective, and with regards to epistemology, they hold that knowledge is constructed by the human mind and emerges out of the interaction between researchers and their world.

An interpretivist worldview has been adopted in this study for two reasons. First, it is determined by the subjective nature of the main research question. Since the main aim of this project is to interpret the influences of stakeholders on quality assurance approaches in a selected Sino-UK partnership institution, the word interpret indicates that the researcher intends to acquire knowledge by means of interpreting and making sense of a social phenomenon. In this way, the nature of knowledge is seen to be subjective, and knowledge is created through the interaction between the human mind and the outside world, which is the essence of the interpretivist worldview (Crotty, 1998; Bryman, 2012). Second, it is
determined by the relationship between the researcher and knowledge. As this study seeks to understand the social phenomenon of quality assurance in a Sino-UK partnership institution, the researcher is required to get close to the reality of the participants, listening, asking questions, and getting to know their perspectives. Since the interpretivist worldview suggests that knowledge is constructed during the interaction between the research and reality, the adoption of an interpretivist worldview will enable the researcher to immerse herself in the natural setting of that particular institution and approach the participants who work and study there.

Other major worldviews such as positivism, critical theory, feminism, and pragmatism all take very different positions from interpretivism (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998; Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006; Creswell, 2009). For example, unlike interpretivists, positivists believe that the nature of knowledge is objective, and that knowledge exists independently of the human mind. As such, they advocate a scientific approach to “discover” knowledge through objective observation, verification, and measurement (Anderson and Gary, 1998; Clark, 1998). Meanwhile, unlike the quantitative and qualitative divide, critical theorists take a new approach. They are not concerned with whether knowledge is either technical positivist or hermeneutic interpretivist (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Crotty, 1998; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2012). Instead, they see the existing power, inequalities, and social injustices in society and strive to empower people to overcome the social constraints (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014). In other words, they seek to interrogate, to critique, and to make changes to the conventional rules and values that people usually take for granted. Therefore, these worldviews were considered inappropriate for this study.
4.4 Research Approach

A research approach refers to the general plan for how researchers go about conducting their research (Creswell, 2014). A research approach plays an important role in a study because it can inform the choices made in designing distinct research strategies, as well as the methods or procedures of data collection and analysis.

There are three major research approaches distinguished by Creswell (2014): quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods. The quantitative research approach is commonly used in positivistic studies, especially in the natural sciences. One of the main characteristics of the quantitative approach is that it aims to determine the cause and effect relationships between variables through systematic testing and experiments. In contrast, the qualitative approach is mostly used among interpretivist researchers. It is the ideal approach for studies that look into human interaction (Lichtman, 2014). Unlike the quantitative approach, qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, focusing on the meanings that people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and situations (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010; Creswell, 2014), and attempt to make sense of complex issues (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The mixed-methods approach combines the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach, attempting to address problems to the extent that they can be studied through multiple perspectives and lenses (Somekh and Lewin, 2005; Creswell, 2014; Lichtman, 2014). As such, the mixed method approach is often applied in pragmatic studies.

This study takes a qualitative approach. The decision to adopt a qualitative research approach is warranted for the following reasons. First, it was determined by the prior existence of the researcher’s interpretivist beliefs. Following Creswell’s (2014) suggestion
that research approaches are influenced by foundational philosophical worldviews, the interpretivist worldview underlying this study determined that the study should use the qualitative approach. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) state that interpretivist researchers tend to use a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis. This is because the epistemological assumption of interpretivism holds that ‘knowledge is contingent upon human being practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context’ (Crotty, 1998, p.42). People and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings, and understandings constitute the construction of knowledge.

The choice of the qualitative research approach was also influenced by the context of the research questions in this study. As Maxwell (2008) suggests, a qualitative research approach is the best for studies that aim to understand:

- ‘the meanings attributed by participants to situations, events, behaviours and activities;
- the influence of context (e.g. physical, social, temporal, interpersonal) on participants’ views, actions and behaviours;
- the processes by which actions, behaviours, situations and outcomes emerge’ (p.75).

As was stated in Section 4.2 of this chapter, this study particularly aims to cover these main issues: the perceptions of stakeholders of the concepts of quality and quality assurance, the behaviours of the key stakeholders in relation to quality assurance practices, and the contextual/ organisational/ interpersonal factors that have a role, which are in accordance with Maxwell’s (2008) points listed above. In addition, given that stakeholders’ beliefs about and experiences of quality assurance vary from individual to individual, a quantitative approach is considered inadequate to cope with the complexities
of quality issues as well as the dynamics of quality assurance practices in the social human world.

4.5 Research Design

Research designs are also called strategies of inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). They refer to ‘procedures of inquiry within qualitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches that provide specific direction for procedures in a research design’ (Creswell, 2014, p. 12). Other scholars (e.g. Rowley, 2002; Yin, 2014) also view a research design as an action plan by which a study gets from an initial set of questions to its conclusions. Specifically speaking, a research design answers four main questions: what questions to study, what data are relevant, what data to collect, and how to analyse the results. According to the classification of Creswell (2007), there are five major qualitative approaches in a research design: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Characterised by a qualitative research approach specifically looking at the issue of quality assurance on the basis of a single Sino-UK partnership institute, this empirical study incorporates the case study design.

4.5.1 A Single-case Study

Case studies are a type of research study which involve an in-depth understanding of a case within a real-life context or setting (Yin, 2014). The unit of the case can be an “individual”, a “small group”, an “organisation”, or a “partnership”, which has an unusual interest in and of itself and needs to be described and detailed (Creswell, 2007). In this research context, the unit of this study is a partnership institute established by a Chinese university and its UK partner, and the object of research is the quality assurance issue in the institute.
Several reasons have contributed to the choice of adopting a case study design. First of all, according to Yin (1994; 2014), case studies are preferred to other research designs when a study asks “how” and “why” questions which are concerned with processes and contextual factors. The main question of this research is a “how” question: i.e., how do different key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in a Sino-UK partnership institution? In keeping with Yin’s (1994, 2014) suggestion, a case study design was deemed appropriate for this study.

Second, Stake (2006) states that case studies are the preferred strategy for studies which aim to generate an in-depth understanding of the case study subjects. This is because case studies typically rely on multiple sources of evidence such as archives, interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and surveys (Yin, 1994; Dooley, 2002), and these various perspectives and lenses can in a way contribute to creating that depth of understanding of the researched topic. As a result, the case study design empowers the researcher to employ multiple data collection methods to achieve an in-depth understanding of quality assurance in this research context.

Third, case studies are particularly useful for studies in which the researcher cannot manipulate the events (Gray, 2012). The quality assurance phenomena at the case study institution already existed independently prior to the research. The researcher did not have the power or the intention to change the current situations of quality assurance in the institution. Other positivist research approaches, such as an experiment or a survey, which usually facilitate research through controlling variables or numbers, would be unfeasible in coping with the social element of quality assurance.
In addition, case study design has the strength of tolerating the real-world case where boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred (Yin, 2014). As quality assurance is a context-sensitive issue in which national, social, and organisational contexts all play important roles in actual practice, such a methodological attribute was deemed suitable to this topic.

There are different types of case study designs according to different scholars (e.g. Yin, 2011; Stake, 2006; Porta and Keating, 2008), but Yin's (2009) single case study and multiple case studies constitute a common form of classification. Based on the units of analysis within the case, he further divides case studies into single-case (holistic) studies, single-case (embedded) studies, multiple-case (holistic) studies, and multiple-case (embedded) studies. The key difference between a holistic and embedded case study is that the holistic case study has only one unit, while the embedded study may have a sub-unit or a number of sub-units. Moreover, holistic designs are applicable to studies which are concerned with the global nature of an organisation or of a programme, while embedded design studies concentrate on the analysis at a sub-unit level (Yin, 2009).

Stake (2006) identifies case studies as intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies focus on a case which itself has intrinsic interest and aim to tease out the particular traits of the case. Instrumental case studies are mainly concerned with cases which are representative of their kind, and therefore aim to draw a generalisation that can be applied to a larger issue. Collective case studies investigate cases of a phenomenon, population, or general condition in order to identify common characteristics. The aim of collective case studies is the generation of theory which can hopefully be applied to a wide group of such cases (Blaikie, 2009).
Additionally, Porta and Keating (2008) propose four main types of case study: descriptive, interpretive, hypothesis-generating, and theory-evaluating. Specifically speaking, descriptive case studies refer to studies which simply aim to provide a detailed description of a phenomenon. No explicit theoretical intention is involved in descriptive studies. Interpretive case studies are studies which aim to provide an explanation of particular cases through referring to existing theories. Hypothesis-generating case studies seek to refine existing hypotheses, and theory-evaluating case studies are used to evaluate existing theories. The latter two types of case study are often used in scientific inquiries.

Based on the classifications above, this case study is:

- A single holistic case study (Yin, 2009) which investigates quality assurance at an individual Sino-UK partnership institute. Although this institute has embedded three to four sub-programmes, due to its small size and a lack of diversity among the programmes, it is viewed as a single unit as a whole. The single-unit institution functions as a second-level college attached to a Chinese public university.

- An intrinsic case study (Stake, 2006) in the way that the case study institution itself has particular traits which deserve research attention. For example, it is a partnership established between a reputable Chinese university and a high-quality UK university, and the partnership has been held up as a demonstrative project of a Chinese-foreign partnership institute in its home province. The findings of this research can provide insight into the issue of quality assurance for other similar Sino-UK partnerships.

- An interpretive case study (Porta and Keating, 2008) which will provide an in-depth exploration and analysis of the quality assurance phenomenon that has occurred in this institution through rich data from documentary analysis and an interpretation of the views and lived experiences of stakeholders.
In summary, it is believed that the case study design has the following advantages. First of all, it recognises the complexities of quality assurance issues as well as the contextual conditions in which quality assurance phenomena exist. Hence, it can provide an in-depth, detailed, and contextualised description of how different key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in the selected partnership institution. Second, it empowers the researcher to be present in the natural setting of the case study institution to get an inside look at its quality assurance phenomena. Third, it enables the researcher to utilise multiple research methods during her data collection processes, which also helps to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings.

4.5.2 A Comparative Approach

Concurrently, a comparative approach is built into the research design. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2014), comparative approaches can be used in both quantitative and qualitative social science studies, but the purposes of comparison differ. For example, the purpose of comparison in quantitative research is to measure differences between groups, while the purpose of comparison in qualitative research is to understand a complex phenomenon. In the case of this qualitative study, a comparative approach was adopted with the expectation that it would allow the researcher to better understand the quality assurance phenomenon in the case study institution through comparing different groups of participants’ views and lived experiences.

Informed by the comparative design, data collection was designed in two stages: first, in the UK home campus, and then in the Chinese campus. Furthermore, two strands of comparison were conducted: a comparison of the views and lived experiences of the participants on both sides of the partnership who have equivalent/ similar roles, and a
comparison of participants’ views and lived experiences across different levels within each campus. Specifically, the comparable variables include individuals’ perceptions of the concepts of quality and quality assurance, and their roles in quality assurance practices.

Through comparing different stakeholders’ perceptions and views according to the hierarchy of job roles, the researcher sought to uncover the complexities of the quality assurance issue, the uniqueness of each stakeholder’s perspective, and to recognise the pertinent contextual conditions.

4.6 Sampling

There are various types of sampling strategies in the research method literature, which are divided into those based on probability samples (where elements of the population are chosen at random and have a known probability of selection), and on non-probability samples (where units are deliberately selected to reflect particular features of the sampled population and have an unknown probability of selection) (Creswell, 2014; Robson, Mccartan and Kieran, 2016). Probability sampling is more often used in quantitative studies; its specific techniques include simple random, systematic, stratified random, cluster, multi-stage sampling, whereas non-probability sampling is associated with qualitative studies of which the specific techniques include quota, dimensional, convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling.

This qualitative study made use of multiple non-probability sample techniques during the courses of research site sampling and participants sampling, respectively. To be specific, in the sampling of the case study institution, this study used the convenience sampling method; and in the sampling of participants, this study used the purposive method during the selection of the institutional academic managers and departmental programme
directors, and snowball sampling methods during the selection of teaching staff and students.

### 4.6.1 Sampling of Case Study Institution

Given that this is a single-case study, the present study only needs one sample of a Sino-UK partnership institution for data collection. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, there are currently 17 Sino-UK partnership institutions in China (See Table 2.3), which comprises the total population of the sample members. The convenience sampling method was used in sampling the case institution.

The convenience method is a sampling method in which selection is made purely based on who was available. During the course of convenience sampling, three convenience factors play important roles in affecting the researcher’s choice: the time, costs, and accessibility of data collection (Yin, 2009; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2012).

First of all, it is worth mentioning that this study is a research project for the researcher’s PhD. Given the time and costs constraints associated with such a project, the researcher was inclined to select an institution which is geographically convenient to her. Thus, she primarily focused on Sino-UK partnership institutions based in Eastern China, where she grew up. Second, due to the sensitivity and confidentiality of this topic, the sampling of the case study institution was very restricted by the practicality factor, i.e., the possibility of data collection during the process. According to the ethics rules of her home university, the researcher had to obtain a letter of permission from the case study institution before embarking on her data collection. The researcher began by contacting the “gatekeepers” of potential institutions (e.g., head of department, principal of teaching and learning, or deans), mostly via email. However, the negotiation processes turned out to be much more
difficult than she originally expected. In total, the researcher contacted 8 institutions over a timescale of approximately 5 months. Of the 8, 3 rejected, 4 did not reply, and only 1 institution, the present case study institution, granted her the permission. Considering all the convenience factors, this present case study institution among the list presented in Table 2.3 was selected.

4.6.2 Sampling of Participants

In order to address the research questions, the sampling of participants was based on the principle of looking for the key stakeholders of quality assurance in relation to the case study partnership institution. Based on stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities, the sample members were categorised into 3 groups: 1) the UK and Chinese institutional academic managers; 2) the UK and Chinese departmental and programme level teachers; and 3) the student representatives\(^2\). However, it is worth mentioning that programme directors who belonged to the departmental and programme level were teachers at the same shouldering both teaching and administrative responsibilities in the joint programmes. The present study primarily made use of 2 non-probability sampling techniques: purposive sampling for the selection of academic managers, programme directors, and teacher trainers, and snowball sampling for sampling the teaching academics and the student representatives.

Purposive sampling, as the name suggests, refers to a sampling strategy by which the members of a sample are chosen with a ‘purpose’ (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014). The purpose could be to look for some samples which represent a type in relation to particular key

\(^2\) Note: these are all Chinese citizens who were admitted through the Chinese National Higher Education Entrance Examination (gaokao) system.
criteria. Purposive sampling is mostly used in cases when particular people, events, or settings are ‘information-rich’ and are believed to provide the best perspective to answer the research questions (Patton, 1990; Gray, 2009; Robson, Mccartan and Kieran, 2016). In this case, a purposive sampling strategy was employed in the selection of the academic managers, programme directors, and teacher trainers because they had unique roles in relation to quality assurance. Thus, they can provide their own particular perspective on quality assurance. In order to identify the specific people, the researcher made use of this university’s websites and searched for their names, roles and job titles in relation to the partnership institution. Meanwhile, in order to make sure that important informants would not be missed, advice was sought from a contact responsible for overseeing quality assurance in the partnership institution, who was able to double-check the final sampling list.

Meanwhile, another strategy, snowball sampling, was used in the selection of teacher participants and student representatives, specifically at the research site in China. As a type of non-probability sampling technique, snowball sampling selects samples by identifying one or more subjects in the beginning, who, in turn, identify others among their acquaintances (Gray, 2009). According to Robson, Mccartan and Kieran (2016), this approach is particularly useful when a researcher has difficulties identifying a ‘hidden population’ who are difficult to reach from outside. Because much of the contact information of the teaching staff and students was not shown on the university website, the researcher was not able to identify the population of the teachers and students at this partnership institution while she was still in the UK. Given this circumstance, therefore, the researcher decided to use the snowball sampling strategy to recruit teachers and student representatives as participants while she was at the institution.
Overall, a sample of 39 participants was recruited for this study. Participant samples in this study range from academic managers, subject teachers and English language teachers to student representatives from different programmes. By covering a wide range of participants, it was hoped that a comprehensive insight into the quality assurance of the partnership institution from different perspectives would be gained. The sample of 39 was considered convenient and adequate in this qualitative study because the study sought to provide an in-depth understanding of the problem under examination, rather than simply generalising the data collected (Yin, 2009; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2012). Table 4.2 indicates the composition, the number of participants, and the forms of soliciting information.

Table 4-1 Composition, Number of Participants and Research Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of participants</th>
<th>Participants based in the UK partner institution</th>
<th>Participants based in the Sino-UK partnership institution</th>
<th>Research methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 Academic managers</td>
<td>1 Dean of teaching and learning (T&amp;L); 1 Partnership director; 1 Quality officer;</td>
<td>1 Secretary of the party; 1 Faculty dean; 2 Deputy deans</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Teaching staff</td>
<td>5 Programme directors 1 Subject teacher; 2 English language teacher trainers (pair interview); 1 Academic developer</td>
<td>2 foreign subject teachers; 3 foreign English language teachers; 2 Chinese English language teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Student representatives</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3 Chairs of Student Union; 4 Representatives of</td>
<td>Focus group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teams</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Team leaders of English language learning; 4 Class monitors</td>
<td>39 participants</td>
<td>22 Semi-structured interviews; 3 focus group discussions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.7 Data Collection Methods and Analysis Procedures

4.7.1 Recruitment of Participants

The data collection was carried out in two phases according to the research sites: phase one in the UK partnership institution, and phase two in the partnership institution in China. During the data collection in phase one at the UK site, I first contacted the participants one by one via email and arranged schedules for interview meetings. This process worked very effectively, and all of the targeted participants agreed to take part in this study. In a week, I managed to recruit all of the participants at the UK institution, including the dean of teaching and learning, the partnership director, the quality officer, 5 programme directors, the academic developer, 1 subject teacher, and 2 English language teachers who had provided training to the English language teachers in China. After the data collection in the UK was completed, I returned to my home university in Glasgow and started transcribing the interviews conducted at the UK institution. This process was intended to help to familiarise myself with the data collected in the UK, to reflect on the weaknesses and strengths of my interview techniques, and to refine the interview questions for the participants in China. Two weeks after the data collection in the UK, I travelled to China and started phase 2 of the data collection.

During phase 2 of the data collection in China, all 4 of the Chinese academic managers, including the party secretary, faculty dean, and 2 deputy deans, were recruited through the purposive sampling technique. I first approached an academic manager at the institution and asked her to introduce me to a few teachers who teach in the partnership institution. By doing so, I managed to recruit teachers who represented different groups: 2 foreign subject teachers, 2 Chinese English language teachers, and 3 foreign English language teachers.
However, the job positions of the academic managers at the Chinese institution did not mirror those of their counterparts in the UK due to the differences in the institutional structures.

Lastly, during the course of recruiting student participants, I also used a snowball sampling technique with the assistance of a Chinese teacher who introduced 18 student representatives in her classes who either have leadership roles in the student union or in their own academic classes, such as the chair of the student union, a representative of academic studies, team leaders of English language learning, and class monitors.

4.7.2 Data Collection Methods

As was mentioned in Section 4.5, this qualitative single-case study was informed by an interpretivist worldview of which the central concern is to understand the perceptions, the contexts, and lived experiences of stakeholders with regards to quality assurance in a selected Sino-UK partnership institution in China. As such, the research required data collection methods ideally suited to analysing the contexts in which the study was undertaken, and especially, to capture the words and actions of participants. The methods of documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions were employed for data collection in this study.

Documentary analysis

Documentary analysis is a common qualitative research method which involves systematically examining or evaluating either print or electronic documents in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Documents analysed in this study included the Chinese national government’s
policies on China’s partnership institutions, policy documents from the UK university, and QAA’s guidelines in relation to quality assurance in UK’s transnational provisions. These documents can be accessed online from the central government/university/organisation websites.

The purpose of the documentary analysis was to gain background knowledge on the quality assurance of this institution. The analysis of documents was guided by these questions: What main policies in relation to quality assurance are in place? What are the definitions of quality and quality assurance according to these policies? What are the goals, requirements, and procedures of the quality assurance activities? These questions were expected to help lead to an understanding of the policy contexts in which the selected institution operated, and the meanings of quality in text, and the current quality assurance structures in the case study institute. The specific documents reviewed include:

The Chinese national government’s policies on China’s partnership institutions, namely,

- *Notice on the Quality Assessment of Sino-foreign Cooperative Education in Running schools* (2009)

These policy regulations have helped in understanding the Chinese national quality assurance framework for transnational partnerships in terms of the government’s policy
guidelines in introducing high-quality foreign education resources in new programme approvals and the ultimate goal in improving education competitiveness of national higher education.

Policy documents from the UK home university included guidelines of the processes and criteria for the approval, monitoring, review, and withdrawal of new programmes (including partnerships) as well as descriptions of the duties and responsibilities of programme directors, which are freely available from the university website. These documents show that the UK home university has developed a systematic internal quality assurance system for its academic programmes. They helped in understanding relevant quality assurance rules and regulations in the UK home university in general as well as regarding partnership programmes and the roles and responsibilities of programme directors for transnational provisions. In the interests of ensuring anonymity of the participants, these documents are not listed here in this thesis, as they could then be used to easily identify the university and therefore the participants, who had all been assured of anonymity and contributed to the study on that understanding.

In addition, QAA’s *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education (2010)* in relation to transnational provisions was also reviewed to generate an understanding of the UK government’s/ quality agent’s requirements on quality assurance in overseas programmes.

In summary, the review and evaluation of policy documents informed me about the quality assurance context at the policy level and university level in China and the UK. It also helped me to generate interview questions on the topics around the perceptions, quality assurance approaches, and criteria used for quality assurance. In addition, the documentary analysis was also used to validate findings from other methods such as semi-structured
interviews and focus group discussions in order to achieve the triangulation of research methods, minimise bias and foster the credibility of the study’s findings.

**Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study during data collection. As is suggested by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2012), interviews are useful in gathering information about a person’s perceptions, views, and lived experiences. This study used interviews to acquire information on different groups of participants’ perceptions of the concepts of quality and quality assurance, and their views and lived experiences in quality assurance practices.

There are 3 main types of interviews based on the degree of structure: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews (Gary, 2009). Structured interviews are often used in quantitative studies in which questions are mostly standardised and have little flexibility. Thus, they were deemed unsuitable for this study. Unstructured interviews often come with little or no organisation. Thus, they are often very difficult to manage and analyse. Semi-structured interviews can be planned and have a greater degree of flexibility. In particular, they allow for the probing of views and opinions when it is desirable for respondents to clarify their points. Thus, this study employed semi-structured interviews, which were conducted face-to-face. The purpose of using semi-structured interviews was to develop a deep understanding of how different key stakeholders perceive the meanings of quality and quality assurance, their views on the current quality assurance practices, and their lived experiences in relation to quality assurance activities through conversations and interactions.
Overall, 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted in the UK and Chinese research sites, with 11 carried out in each institution respectively. The interviews were conducted in the university setting, either in the participant’s office or in a university meeting room which was convenient for the participants. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes and was recorded based upon each participant’s verbal consent.

**Focus group interviews**

Focus group interviews were conducted in this study to provide insight into quality assurance from the students’ perspectives. Unlike one-on-one individual interviews, focus group interviews involve multiple participants joining together, elaborating on their views, querying others’, and interacting with each other in a group setting (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010). It is through the dynamics of social interaction and stimulation (termed the ‘group effect’) that different voices are brought out and new ideas are developed, thus making focus group interviews attractive to many qualitative researchers (Morgan and Krueger, 1993; Morgan, 1996). This study employed the method of focus group interviews with the student participants in an attempt to obtain rich and fruitful data through group discussions. Student voice was not the focus of this study. The reason that I conducted focus group discussions with the students was to generate a full understanding of the quality assurance mechanisms in the case study partnership. The data collected from focus group discussions is primarily discussed in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3.4) which contributes to understanding the roles and engagement of the students in quality assurance activities and to what extent student engagement had an influence on quality assurance approaches in actual practice, and helps to validate the findings regarding local managers’ and teachers’ approaches to collecting student feedback. This study used focus group interviews with students as a matter of practicality as there were a large number of students (over 300) in the case study institution. It would have been impractical to conduct one-on-one individual
interviews with all of the students given the limitations of time and resources. Compared to individual interviews, focus group interviews are deemed a more efficient technique because they enable the researcher to collect data from several people at the same time (Robson, Mccartan and Kieran, 2016).

Overall, three focus group interviews with 3 to 8 participants each were held in the university setting of the Chinese case study institution. Student participants in the group were between from 18 and 21 years old who had been admitted via the Chinese National Higher Education Entrance Examination system (gaokao). Most of them held student representative roles in the Student Union or their own academic classes, such as chair of student union, representatives of academic studies, team leaders of English language learning, and 4 class monitors.

4.7.3 Data Analysis Procedures

This study used a thematic analysis approach for the data analysis. The thematic analysis approach is a data analysis method which involves identifying and analysing patterns within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following a thematic analysis approach, the researcher analyses data by looking for key concepts, coding and writing memos, and making sense of the similarities and differences, relationships, and thematic constructs. It is particularly powerful in dealing with large chunks of data and developing robust interpretations while preserving the original contexts (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014).

Braun and Clarke (2006) identify the six phases of thematic analysis approach: familiarising oneself with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes, and producing the report. The data to be analysed in this
study primarily stemmed from the 22 staff semi-structured interviews and 3 student focus group discussions which were audio recorded and carefully encrypted with a password. Following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) suggestions, I decided to analyse data according to the following steps.

The first step was transcribing. Although transcribing seems technically rather straightforward, qualitative researchers (e.g. Bailey, 2008; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010) remind us that it is rather an interpretive act which requires the researcher’s active engagement with the recordings, deep listening, analysing and interpreting. During the course of transcribing, I listened to the recordings carefully and put them into words. Initial important thoughts (termed as “memos”) were noted during the transcription processes. Altogether, this recursive, interactive, and back-and-forth process of data transcription took approximately one month. Over a hundred pages of transcripts were produced with memos attached in the margin of each page. After all the data was transcribed, I moved on to the second step: coding.

Coding is the process of naming or labelling things, categories, and properties against pieces of data (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010; Punch, 2005). During the course of coding, I attached meaning to the pieces of data, labelling them and categorising them into analytical segments. Moreover, I coded the data according to my research questions and the theoretical framework in relation to the key stakeholders’ influences on quality assurance approaches. Two main categories were generated: 1) stakeholders’ perceptions, including their priorities, views and concerns about quality and quality assurance; 2) stakeholders’ roles and engagement in quality assurance practices, with attention paid to the major issues that the stakeholders were focused on at different phases of the partnership.
The third step was searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes. After completing all the coding, I read all the collated codes, sorted them into potential themes, and after that, keeping the research questions in mind, I identified the relationships among the themes and related them to each other. I related all the themes to an overall story regarding developing a partnership in the context of transnational higher education.

The final step was producing the report. I selected the extracts, compared them, and related them back to the research questions, literature review, and theoretical framework. In addition, due to the uniqueness of each participant’s perspective, I also highlighted the salient issues that the participants mentioned in the interviews to generate an overall picture of how quality assurance works in a transnational partnership.

Although there is an array of specialist qualitative analysis software available for qualitative research, such as CAQDAS, NUD*IST and NVivo, which can be time-saving and efficient when dealing with large chunks of data, I did not employ any during data analysis. This was because the volume of the data was manageable, and I believe manual coding enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the data and recognise the nuances of the participants’ responses.

4.8 Reflection on the Research Process

4.8.1 Ethical Considerations

All social research involves ethical issues because it involves collecting data from and about people (Punch, 2005). As such, the social researcher must critically reflect on the effects of their research on the participants, making sure that participants will not suffer
any physical, physiological or emotional harm (May, 2011; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2012). This study was carried out with the ethics approval of the College Research Ethics Committee of my home university in the UK. Before the first interview began, each participant was provided with a Plain Language Statement detailing the purposes of the study, why the participants were selected, and how the data would be used, as well as an informed consent form in order to confirm whether participants were willing to be involved. In addition to this, the participants were also informed that their participation was completely voluntary, and they were free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. In terms of the venues, all interviews took place in the university setting, where participants felt safe and comfortable. Due to the perceived sensitivity and confidentiality of the topic, the name of the institution and the participants have been kept anonymous and replaced with a code that cannot be identified by others. Throughout the data analysis and interpretation processes, the audio data was stored in my personal computer, which is protected with a password, and the manually-taken field notes were stored and locked in an office cabinet to which only I had access.

4.8.2 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are two central concepts in any discussion of generalisation because they are concerned with the credibility of the original research findings of a study (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014). Validity is concerned with the accuracy of the findings, and reliability is concerned with the replicability of the findings. Although the two concepts were first developed in the natural sciences, now they have been applied to qualitative research. This study has paid attention to validity and reliability throughout the research design, data collection, and data analysis. In order to maintain validity and reliability, I employed a combination of 3 main methods: triangulation, member checking, and thick description (Creswell, 2014).
The idea of triangulation is to introduce different sources of information to help confirm and improve the clarity of the research findings. This study used multiple research methods (e.g. documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions) during data collection, and brought in the voices of a variety of participants (e.g., senior academic managers, programme directors, teaching staff, and student representatives) for the research questions, which was deemed sufficient and adequate in producing the robustness of the research findings (Cohen et al., 2007; Ryan et al., 2007; Bryman, 2012).

In order to ensure that I did not misinterpret or misreport anything, I use the method of member checking to help ensure the accuracy of data. After the major findings were analysed and written down, I sent the semi-polished piece of writing via email to the staff members who were involved in the data collection to ask for their confirmation about the ‘reality’ of the findings as presented. The support from the people who deal with quality assurance from day to day can serve as convincing evidence for the accuracy of findings (Seale, 1999).

Thick description involves the researcher’s rich and detailed description of a research setting (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Creswell, 2014). The aim of thick description is to build up a clear picture of the research context so that readers can cognitively and emotively ‘place’ themselves within it (Holloway, 1997; Ponterotto, 2006). In this study, I provided detailed explanations of the research context, research design, and the processes of how data was gathered and analysed. This is expected to be the best way to present the readers with an authentic, real, and convincing story.
4.8.3 Limitations of the Findings

However, all studies have limitations. The limitations of the research findings in this study are enumerated below.

First of all, starting with a single-case study design, this study aims to develop an in-depth understanding of how different stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in a Sino-UK partnership institute. As such, it is important to note that the findings of this study may not be fully applicable to any other partnership cases considering the differences in local contexts. Future studies with higher degree of generalisation concerning the similarities and differences among several similar types of Sino-UK partnerships are called for.

Second, language is an important factor that might have affected the validity and reliability of the research findings. On the one hand, in interviews conducted in English with the Chinese participants, the use of English may have restricted their ability to express their opinions, thus reducing the authenticity of the reality presented. On the other hand, interviews conducted in Chinese but translated into English at the transcription stage come with the risk of losing the nuances of language in the translation process. In addition, it cannot be ignored that English is not my first language. During the course of data collection, there were a few occasions when I was asked to clarify the questions to the participants owing to vagueness in the use of language (Squires, 2008).

Third, due to the fact that staff participants in this study are people who are professional academics who have high social status and expertise in their field, and that some of them are professors or associate professors, power distance and unbalanced relationships might
have existed during the interviews between me and the participants (Anyan, 2013). In addition, there might be a sense of unbalanced power distance between me and the students as well because they may consider me as the authority of the research. In the beginning of the focus group discussions, the students were very shy and nervous about answering my questions. This situation improved after I reassured them that there were no right or wrong answers but that I wanted to know their experiences and views on quality assurance. Thus, these issues might have led to biases in the data.

4.8.4 The Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher in this study is interesting because I had the dual role of an insider and an outsider during the research process. On the one hand, I considered myself as an insider of the study because I am bilingual and know both the UK and Chinese higher education systems and cultures well after having been studying in the UK for over 3 years. This advantage allowed me to develop trust and rapport with both my UK and Chinese participants, and to understand what they were talking about during the interviews. On the other hand, I considered myself as an outsider of the research as well because I come from an external UK higher education institution (Berg et al., 2004), and I tried to be objective observant rather than a member of the community. During the data collection, I reassured the participants that the purpose of this study was not to evaluate the quality of their partnership but to understand the phenomenon of stakeholders’ influences on quality assurance in a transnational partnership.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed how the research was designed, implemented, and analysed, and it discussed the issues that I encountered during the research process. In summary, this study
was designed as a qualitative single-case study in order to develop an in-depth understanding of quality assurance in a selected Sino-UK partnership institute. The study was carried out in the UK first and subsequently in China in the form of 22 semi-structured interviews and 3 focus group interviews, with 39 participants including staff and students contributing to this study. Due to ethical considerations, all information about the participants in the research was kept confidential. My perceived role as an insider and an outsider were noted as important factors in the fieldwork. The limitations of this study are discussed in Chapter 7. The following two chapters present the researching findings. Chapter 5 examines how the key stakeholders perceive the concepts of quality and quality assurance; and Chapter 6 explores the roles and engagement of the key stakeholders in ensuring quality and their influences on quality assurance in practice.
Chapter 5 Stakeholders’ Perceptions of Quality and Quality Assurance in Transnational Higher Education

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on exploring how the key stakeholders perceive the concepts of quality and quality assurance in the case study institution. The ‘key stakeholders’ here refer to the different UK and Chinese groups of faculty members who were involved in this partnership, including the institutional academic managers and the departmental and programme level programme directors, teacher trainers, and teaching academics. The findings are presented according to the managerial and academic roles of these faculty members and analysed with reference to Clark’s (1983) model. The analysis of the findings is on multi-dimensional levels (macro, meso, and micro), although the meso level is less prominent. A chapter summary is provided in Section 5.4 to sum up the influences of the key stakeholders and discusses the links of these influences with Clark’s (1983) model.

To begin with, a brief introduction to the background of the case study partnership is presented to help inform the findings and analysis.

5.2 Background of the Case Study Partnership Institute
The case study partnership institute belongs to a second-tier college in China attached to the Chinese host institution, which is a public university (tier 1 but not a Project ‘985’ or Project ‘211’ university) governed by the local province. At the time of data collection, the institute had only a 3-year history and 4 degree programmes (Economics, Chemistry, Engineering and Maths) in operation in the form of ‘3+1’ articulation. According to the arrangement of the ‘3+1’ programmes, students study at the partnership institute for the first 3 years and transfer to the UK institution during their final year. Upon successful completion of the ‘3+1’ programmes, students are awarded dual degrees from both institutions. In terms of the legal responsibility of quality assurance, the Chinese parent institution takes the major responsibility for the first 3 years while students are in China, and the UK home institution is only responsible for quality assurance in the final year programmes.

After the partnership had been developed for 3 years or so, the two partners were transitioning to the ‘4+0’ franchising model. The two partners called this phase of partnership the ‘enhanced phase’. In the enhanced phase ‘4+0’ programmes, students will be studying in China for the whole 4 years and be awarded a UK degree qualification.

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3 Chinese universities are categorised into 3 tiers. Tier 1 universities encompass the key national universities; the entry requirements of tier 1 universities are the highest among the three. These Tier 1 universities are often directly governed and sponsored by the national provincial Ministries of Education.

4 Project ‘985’ is a constructive project announced by the Chinese president Jiang Zemin at the 100th anniversary of Peking University for founding world-class universities. By 2011, 39 Chinese top universities had been selected as ‘985’ universities before this project closed its doors; no more new universities have been able to join since that time.

5 Project ‘211’ is a project of the Chinese government. It is a new endeavour aimed at raising the research standards and education level of national universities and training high-level professional manpower to facilitate the country’s socio-economic development. To date, 116 Chinese universities have been designated as ‘211’ project members.
During this phase, it will be the UK partner who takes the full legal quality assurance responsibility according to their agreement.

Despite the differences in the degree-awarding between the two types of programmes, students studying in both types of arrangements are all recruited via the traditional Chinese College Entrance Examination (gaokao) system. In other words, student candidates must at least meet the cut-off score of tier 1 universities in the local province.

5.3 Perceptions of Quality and Quality Assurance

The literature (see Harvey and Green, 1993; Cheng and Tam, 1997; Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2002) suggests that the concept of quality in higher education is elusive. Different groups of faculty members may perceive it differently due to their particular perspectives. Indeed, in this study, the data show that there were differences between different groups of faculty members regarding their perceptions of quality and quality assurance at both institutions. The initial intention was to present the faculty members’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance separately. However, the findings suggest that some of the faculty members did not differentiate between the two concepts distinctively (this will be discussed in detail in the sections below), which makes discussing the two concepts separately difficult. For this reason, I decided to present the two concepts together. The findings of this chapter highlight the complexity in the concepts of quality and quality assurance in the context of a Sino-UK transnational partnership.
5.3.1 The UK and Chinese Institutional Academic Managers’ Perceptions of Quality and Quality Assurance

Staff members in different groups (i.e. institutional academic managers, programme directors and teachers) in the UK and Chinese partner institutions had different focuses and priorities of quality in this study. For example, on the UK side, the institutional academic managers’ fundamental concern was to protect the legitimacy of their home university. The urgency of legitimacy was highly stressed by the UK academic managers at the institutional level (i.e. dean of teaching and learning and quality officer). When they were asked about what they were most concerned about in relation to quality and quality assurance, for example, the UK dean of teaching and learning replied:

My understanding on quality assurance is, I give training courses on this to colleagues in [name of the UK institution] that British universities are independent. The thing that really characterises the British universities is that we have our own awarding of our degree powers. That is the prize assets that British universities have, which theoretically can be taken away if we don’t quality assure what we do well enough. Because we are awarding our own degrees, we are awarding degrees on the basis of our examinations and assessments. Because of that, we need our guarantee on the standards of student examinations and assessments. (Dean of T&L, UK)

The quotation shows that the UK dean of teaching and learning’s primary concern of quality and quality assurance was to safeguard their home university’s degree awarding power, that is, university legitimacy. Similar views were shared by the quality officer who worked for the university’s quality assurance department. She stated,
My main concern out of everything is our degree awarding powers and that all comes down to assessment. So, my overriding concern of everything is to make sure that assessment is comparable and that is at the right standards... When we award our degree, we know that degree is equivalent to someone who studies programmes here in [the UK].

(Quality officer, UK)

The above quotations of both respondents indicate that protecting the UK university’s degree awarding power/legitimacy was the first and foremost issue for the UK institutional academic managers. This was closely related to the UK home university’s institutional quality assurance policy context. Many foreign universities nowadays have developed a series of quality assurance policy rules and regulations to control quality in their transnational programmes, including the UK. As described in Chapter 2 (see p.36), the QAA clearly requires the UK higher education institutions to be responsible for the academic standards in their collaborative provision that involves degree awarding. Indeed, the analysis of the UK home university’s quality assurance policies shows that the case study partnership programmes sat in the same quality assurance framework as their home institution, and thus were subject to the UK home university’s quality assurance rules and procedures. For example, the quality officer stated that they did due diligence checks on university documents, webpages, and resources before signing for the agreements and regular checks on quality afterwards to ensure the partnerships are run in accordance with the rules and regulations in relation to transnational programmes of their home university.

The findings have highlighted the influence of the ‘UK home university’ on the UK institutional managers’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance. Linking to the theoretical model of this study, the force of the foreign home university does not align with Clark’s model.
Unlike the UK institutional managers whose major concern was to maintain their home university’s degree-awarding power, it appears that the Chinese academic managers based at the local partnership institute paid more importance to introducing advanced education resources and expertise. The Chinese local academic managers (e.g. faculty dean; party secretary, 2 deputy deans) stressed that they have introduced high-level education resources and teaching expertise from various sources, including the foreign partner, similar higher education institutions with more experience, and other departments of the Chinese parent university. They indicated that the major reason for this was due to the Chinese government’s policy rules. As the Chinese faculty dean emphasised, ‘the fundamental principle of the Chinese government was to introduce high-quality education resources from the foreign partner’.

Apart from the emphasis on introducing advanced education resources from the foreign institution, it appears that the Chinese managers were also very concerned about student cultivation and graduate attributes. They emphasised that their fundamental goal was to cultivate students into the successors of the socialist country.

Our fundamental goal is to cultivate students to become useful talents when they enter society. Because we are a socialist country, our universities should focus on cultivating students into the successors of the socialist society. (Party secretary, China)

The managers described that they want to develop students into different types of useful talents, such as elite managers of international enterprises, government officers, university scholars, middle-level managers of companies, and masters of their field. They paid high
importance to graduate attributes, such as communication skills, sense of cooperative spirit, and sense of social responsibility. In particular, the Chinese academic managers indicated that they would like to develop students’ intercultural capabilities and English language skills to compete in the international job market. In addition to that, moral education was also stressed by the Chinese academic managers.

*We want students to have fluent English language skills, international horizons, excellent communication skills, hard-working and dedicated attitudes, and of course, a good heart.* (Chinese faculty dean, China)

The Chinese academic managers’ emphasis on introducing high-quality education resources and student cultivation was deeply rooted within the Chinese political and educational background in relation to the Chinese government’s policy requirements on Chinese higher education institutions’ mission. The findings have highlighted that on the Chinese side, the managers’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance were deeply influenced by the government. Linking to Clark’s model, the findings align with the force of the government in terms of political coordination.

Despite the fundamental differences in the overriding concerns between the two parties, the findings suggest that the managers shared the same interests in creating a high reputation for their partnership and gaining financial benefits from this collaboration. For example, the partnership director stated that the two partners wanted to develop a very successful and unique partnership institute among their similar peer institutions. The following statement of the partnership director have showed this:
We want to create first-class programmes which blend the strength of the two parties and have our own characteristics. For example, the programmes we are offering are all strong subjects of the two partner universities. In the long term, it is important to promote internationalisation for the two partners. We would like to make the [name of the partnership institution] very successful and unique, one of the best among China’s domestic partnership institutions. (Partnership director, UK)

A high reputation is crucial for competing for students and funding from the government. It appears that the two partners in this study had realised this. The data show that both the UK and the Chinese partners had an interest in reaping financial benefits from this partnership. They were very concerned about how many students they can sustainably attract and how much money they could charge for tuition fees. This was particularly shown in the evidence by the UK academic managers. For example, the UK quality officer suggested that if the partnership failed for any reason, it would be the financial problem.

*I think the main issue is if for any reason the agreement falls down, honestly it will be mainly around finance if there is anything else. We can continue the ‘3+1’ model for a little while but ultimately the MOE stipulations state that if for any reason we can’t offer the 4+0 programmes, it may well be we are in the position of where we have to withdraw. And I really hope that doesn’t happen and I am confident that at the moment that everything will go as planned. But who knows what the future holds? (Quality officer, UK)*
However, although both the UK and Chinese academic managers were attracted to the financial interests that were generated by this partnership institute, in comparison, it appears that the UK managers cared more about the financial interests of this partnership than the Chinese. This indicates the two partners’ utmost fundamental motives for this partnership were different, as Hou, Montgomery and McDowell (2014) suggested that UK universities are ostensibly driven by financial reasons when conducting transnational higher education activities, whilst the Chinese aim to improve themselves by getting access to advanced education resources from prestigious foreign partners. Despite this, the findings suggest that the UK and Chinese academic managers’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance were influenced by market forces. Linking to Clark’s (1983) model, the findings are in line with Clark’s model in terms of market coordination.

It appears that the Chinese parent university leadership also played an important role in supporting the partnership institute managers to develop a high reputation. They provided substantial financial and personnel support to improve the facilities and infrastructures, import teaching and learning materials, and invite UK flying-in and fly-out teachers to teach. In a sense, the Chinese managers’ ambition to develop a high reputation for the partnership was encouraged by their parent university leaders. Thus, it is necessary to acknowledge the influence of the Chinese parent university on the local academic managers’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance. Linking to Clark’s model, however, the force of the domestic parent institution was not included.

*Our university is very supportive. They have sponsored us with a few millions these past years to encourage us to develop a good brand, a brand of quality assurance. (Faculty dean, China)*
However, it appears that the influence of the Chinese parent university was less prominent compared to the Chinese government because there was little evidence indicating that the Chinese parent university had placed specific quality assurance rules or regulations on this partnership. For the Chinese managers, meeting the government’s expectations and developing students into useful talents were the fundamental concern more than anything else. This might be related to the Chinese state-oriented higher education system that the government is the authority of regulating higher education institutions.

To summarise, this section presents how the UK and Chinese academic managers perceive the concepts of quality and quality assurance. The data show that the UK home university and the market had influences on the UK academic managers’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance, while the Chinese government, the market, and the Chinese parent university were the key forces that influenced how the Chinese academic managers perceive quality and quality assurance. The forces of the market and the state have been recognised in Clark’s (1983), however, the forces of the UK home university and the Chinese parent university were missing. The next section discusses how the lower level staff members, i.e. the departmental and programme level programme directors, teacher trainers, and teaching academics perceive quality and quality assurance.

### 5.3.2 The UK and Chinese Departmental and Programme Level Teachers’ Perceptions of Quality and Quality Assurance

The data show that there existed similarities and differences in the UK and Chinese departmental and programme level teachers’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance. The departmental and programme level teachers included the UK programme directors from different departments, teacher trainers, the UK fly-in and fly-out teaching academics, and the local teachers who were based in China.
It is necessary to highlight the multiple perspectives of the UK programme directors of quality and quality assurance. Indeed, the data show that the programme directors were concerned about multiple issues, such as meeting their home university’s policy requirements, developing the students and teachers, and the financial sustainability of the programmes. First of all, the responses of these programme directors suggest that they were aware of the university’s policy requirements on quality assurance for transnational programmes. They indicated that because students studying in these joint programmes will transfer to the UK in their final year and be awarded with the UK degree qualifications upon successful completion, students’ credits gained from the courses in the partnership institute will be transferred to the UK. As such, they were seeking for a sense of comparability in student assessment and examination results. Because of this, the programme directors suggested that they paid high attention to making sure there is consistency in academic standards between the two institutions. What they did in practice included curriculum mapping, exam moderation, and giving feedback to the local teachers on the delivery methods of the courses. As one of the programme directors described,

The level of individual department, which is my engagement – then I see quality assurance as covering the students’ experience and the academic issues particularly. It’s about making sure that the way the modules are delivered is appropriate, the standards of the teaching satisfactory, the assessment method is in line with the learning outcome, so in other words, the way we describe things is consistent and thorough, the examination papers in the actual assessment match with what has been taught, as far as we’re able to ascertain that, and finally moderating the assessment between the two institutions and having the standards that we require. (Programme director of Economics, UK)
The findings suggest that the UK home university had strongest influence on the programme directors’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance, pushing them to pay high attention to the consistency of academic standards. Linking to Clark’s (1983), however, the force of the UK home university was not in line with the triangle of coordination which consists of the state, the market, and academic oligarchy.

Secondly, the data show that the programme directors were also concerned about student and teacher development which was also stressed by the UK fly-in and fly-out teaching academics and teacher trainers. This might be because the programme directors themselves also undertook part of the teaching work together with the fly-in and fly-out teaching academics apart from being responsible for supporting the local partners in designing the courses. Specifically speaking, these UK teachers were concerned about 3 major issues, namely, student English language skills for academic purposes, subject knowledge development, and student familiarity with the UK’s academic learning environment. Unlike from the economic perspective of quality, these dimensions were related to the educational perspective of quality. In particular, the programme directors and fly-in and fly-out teaching academics stated that when they were teaching in China, they wanted to show students how teaching is conducted in the UK to familiarise them with the educational differences. This concern is expressed in the following quotes.

*I gave them one lecture to give them a feel for how we teach in [name of the UK institution].* (Programme director of Math, UK)

*One of our aims is to show them a little bit of what lectures in [name of the UK university] would be like. So I think I was a bit less bothered that they learned a great deal from the lectures but a bit more that if they are*
going to come to [name of UK university] to study, they have got a bit of
feeling for what lectures here would be like...I think the transition to
come to the UK, they should have a bit of flavour of what it is gonna be
like. (Teaching academic, UK)

As academic professionals, the UK programme directors and teaching academics had their
own understandings of what was the best for the students based on their professional
expertise. The study shows that on the one hand, the UK programme directors were urged
to comply with their home institution’s policy regulations; one the other hand, they had a
genuine concern about the development of students at the individual level. The findings
highlight the challenges of the programme directors in pinning down what quality really is
during the process of their engagement. Linking to Clark’s (1983) model, the individual
level of influences from these academic professionals can be interpreted as professional
coordination, which is in line with the force of academic oligarchy.

In addition, it appears that the programme directors were also concerned about the
financial success of this partnership. They expressed their concerns about whether they
will be able to attract sufficient numbers of students enrolled in their programme. This has
reflected the strong influence of the market on the UK faculty members. This is not
surprising because the sustainable operation of transnational partnerships must be
supported by financial success. It is such a commitment to devote to developing
transnational programmes in another country. If the UK partner cannot continue to recruit a
good number of students, it will become a luxury to think about anything, including
improving the quality of learning and teaching. However, it is noted that compared to the
institutional managers, the level of the influence from the market on the departmental level
was not as strong as that of the institutional managers. This might be related to the fact that
these faculty members held different hierarchical academic positions. The institutional
academic managers had an overview of the strategic development of this partnership, while
the lower-level staff were more focused on the operations of quality activities.

The findings regarding the UK departmental and programme level teachers’ perceptions of
quality have demonstrated the influences of the UK home university, the market, and the
individual academic professionals. However, these three influences come from different
dimensions: the UK home university is from the meso level, the market comes from the
macro level, and the individual academic professionals are from the micro level. The study
shows that multiple levels of influences from the key stakeholders wrestling with each
other, influencing how the UK faculty members perceive quality and quality assurance.

On the Chinese side, the data show that the Chinese local academic managers and teachers
were also concerned about student development. The emphasis on student development is
also linked to the influence of local academic professionals in the partnership institute.
However, it appears that their sense of student development contained richer meanings. For
example, it not only included preparing the students for the UK studies, but also other
issues, such as student psychological health, student personal skills for employment, and
developing student learning interests. For example, one of the local teachers shared her
understanding of quality in relation to supporting the student during the process of
adjusting into the new university life.

As a teacher, I think I will help my students to get accustomed to the new
environment of the university. The students are unfamiliar with
university life when first enter, right? They came across some difficulties
or barriers. I think it’s also my responsibilities to help my students
psychologically. (English language teacher, China)
In addition, the study also shows that the UK departmental teacher trainers and the Chinese local academic managers shared similar interests in improving the local teachers. The UK teacher trainers commented that although the local teachers were experienced and qualified, they did not have much experience of teaching on transnational programmes. Considering that the students will come to the UK to study in their final year, the UK teacher trainers believed it necessary to train the local teachers to prepare the students for the UK studies. Hence, they wanted to deliver professional training to the local teachers to bridge their knowledge gaps in different teaching philosophies and methodologies. The following statement of the UK teacher trainer have evidenced this.

We focused on things like thinking about classroom dynamics, environment, and getting them to reflect what might be different. So we don’t go in and say you should be doing things like this. We just said look, here are some slightly different ways of teaching. We are going to translate theories into practice about current pedagogy in higher education and give you a chance to think about it and try it yourself.

(Academic practice developer, UK)

The teacher trainers suggested that they did not have to comply with any university policy regulation when delivering the training. Their primary interest was to empower and improve the local teachers. Supported by the two universities’ senior managers, the teacher trainers were given space to decide what is best for the quality of the teachers based on their professional expertise. In addition to inviting the UK teachers to give training, the Chinese academic managers also sent their local teachers to receive training in other partnership universities who had longer history and more experience. Moreover, both the UK teacher trainers and Chinese academic managers stressed the importance of the
cultural/ structural element’ (Cardoso, Rosa and Stensaker, 2015) to the improvement of teaching quality. They suggested that it is important to nurture a communicative, committed, and participatory quality culture. For example, the academic practice developer commented that managers should encourage teachers to care about quality and be committed to quality development.

I believe there are two things: if you want things to go well, you invest in good staff, good people and invest in them, grow them, and develop them and motivate them. If you develop them in a really sound culture of quality, in my case, I am always interested in teaching and learning culture. It is hard to do something once it’s gone wrong. So it’s important to grow something really good from the beginning because it is very difficult to go back and put things right, and then make people care, and then make teaching good quality. (Academic practice developer, UK)

The section above shows that both the UK and Chinese teachers, namely, the UK programme directors, teacher trainers, teaching academics, and the Chinese local academic managers and teachers in the university departments had a genuine care about student and teacher development. The findings have demonstrated the important influences from the academic professionals in deciding what quality and quality assurance is in this transnational partnership. Different from the institutional academic managers, the lower-level academic professionals focused more on the educational perspective of quality in education rather than financial benefits, legitimacy, or reputation.

Referring to the theoretical model of this study, the findings align with the force of academic oligarchy through professional coordination. However, it is necessary to note
that these academic professionals belonged to two different institutions. The UK staff members were located in the UK home university, while the local staff were based on the partnership institute. Hence, there is a need to adapt Clark’s (1983) model, adding the dimensions of UK home university and the partnership institute within which the professionals exercised their decision-making on what is quality and quality assurance.

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the findings regarding the UK and Chinese faculty members’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance with reference to the theoretical framework of this study. Section 5.3.1 presents the UK and Chinese institutional academic managers’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance. The findings suggest that there existed similarities and differences between the UK and Chinese institutional academic managers’ perceptions, in terms of their priorities and interests in quality and quality assurance. For example, the UK institutional academic managers’ primary concern was to protect their home university’s legitimacy regarding the degree-awarding powers and maintain financial benefits, whereas the Chinese local managers’ goals were to improve themselves and cultivating students into useful talent for the country and to develop a strong reputation. The findings have demonstrated the strong influences of the market, the UK home university on the UK institutional academic managers’ perceptions, and the government, market, and Chinese parent university (although less prominent) on the Chinese academic managers’ perceptions. Linking to Clark’s (1983) model, the two forces of the market and the government identified in this study align with Clark’s model. However, the forces of two partner institutions, i.e., the UK home university and Chinese parent university were not acknowledged. Thus, the findings suggest that there is a need to add the dimensions of the UK home university and Chinese parent university into this model to fit into transnational higher education contexts.
Section 5.3.2 discusses how the UK and Chinese departmental and programme level teachers perceive quality and quality assurance. In particular, the data show the multiple perspectives of the UK programme directors of quality and quality assurance. They were not only concerned about meeting their home university’s policy regulations, student numbers, but also improving the students and teachers from a professional perspective. In addition, the findings regarding the local faculty members’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance have also demonstrated that the academic managers and teachers in the partnership institute had power deciding what quality is and how to assure/improve it. This has highlighted the strong influences of academic professionals in this case study. Linking to Clark’s (1983) model, the influences of academic professionals is in line with the force of academic oligarchy. However, because these academic professionals were based on the UK home institution and the local partnership institute geographically, I will use the terms ‘UK home institution’ and ‘partnership institute’ to represent the dimension of ‘academic oligarchy’.

Informed by the findings presented in the two sections of this chapter, the theoretical model of this study, i.e. Clark’s (1983) triangle of coordination is developed into a model of coordination among the government, the market, the UK home university, the Chinese parent university, and the partnership institute. The next chapter explores how the key stakeholders are engaged in quality assurance practices with reference to Clark’s (1983) model.
Chapter 6 Stakeholders’ Roles and Engagement in Quality Assurance in Different Phases of the Partnership

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on stakeholders’ roles and engagement in quality assurance development in the case study partnership institute. It aims to explore how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in different phases of the partnership from the initial programme setting-up stage/pre-delivery stage (Section 6.2) to the subsequent programme delivery phase (Section 6.3) and enhanced phase (Section 6.4). It identifies who the key stakeholders are, what key issues they were concerned about, and what specific influences they had during the quality assurance development processes.

The data that I gathered was primarily focused on the ‘3+1’ articulation programmes because at the time of the data collection, the ‘4+0’ programmes were not running yet. Hence, my study is concentrated on how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance in the ‘3+1’ programmes in the case study partnership.

6.2 The Pre-delivery Phase

6.2.1 Signing up the Agreement with the UK Partner

It was the Chinese partner who proposed to the UK partner to set up this partnership institute, which as a second-tier college sat separately within the Chinese parent university. The responses of the Chinese academic managers suggested that the early collaboration and previous relationship with the UK home university have contributed to the smooth
setting up of the partnership, helping to develop trust between the two parties. The deputy dean of international collaboration explained how the partnership was initiated,

*I think from the beginning of the [partnership institute], we have been actually collaborating with the UK institution for many years. When I came back in 2008, I started to contact my supervisor in the UK to start the programme in Applied Chemistry postgraduate studies and then we applied to the MOE in China for undergraduate ‘3+1’ programmes. And based on this, this programme was approved by the MOE in 2011. That’s the very beginning of the Academy...We have had a long collaboration with the UK university and we have a very sound foundation for that. I think quality is the core. (Deputy Dean of International Collaboration, China)*

The statements of the respondent suggest that when setting up a joint partnership, it is helpful if the two partners have already had collaboration experience before and have trustful contacts on each side. In this case, there was a strong sense that both parties were very interested in developing this partnership. As for the motives for collaboration, according to the UK partnership director, the Chinese university wanted to enhance its education strength by utilising the resources introduced from the foreign partner, whereas the UK home institution was attracted to the potential financial interest of this partnership and the opportunities of increasing its global impact.

After the proposal was received, the UK home university staff members went through rigorous quality assurance procedures to decide on the partnership agreement. On the UK
side, it appears that their national and institutional quality assurance regulations were highly influential to the UK academic managers. For example, at the university level, the quality officer suggested that she did ‘due diligence checks around the partnership and the programmes to make sure they fit in the university strategy, resources are in place, and teaching and learning structure is appropriate’. This was to make sure the partnership can run successfully and bring potential educational and financial benefits in the future. The UK managers emphasised that during this stage, they were very concerned about the reputation of the Chinese university. This was because they did not want to risk losing their degree awarding power under the UK national quality assurance background. In order to make more informed decisions, on-site visits were also made between both sides by various groups of university managers, including the university vice-presidents, director of international relations, partnership director, and the deans.

At the departmental and programme level, the programme directors were highly influenced by their university’s quality assurance requirements on transnational programmes. Knowing that students studying in these programmes will transfer to the UK and be awarded with their university’s degree upon completion, the programme directors felt the need to control student learning outcomes. The programme director of Economics shared the story of how the programme of Economics was developed in the early stage and especially his major considerations.

_The interest came from [name of the Chinese parent university]. Professor X came here to discuss setting up a programme in [the local city]. We agreed that we would like to focus on a degree based on one of the existing degrees. So, we wanted to deliver this degree. And the process was really, like, streamline it with our quality assurance requirements, _
setting up a degree here, and also the MOE’s requirements in China which I wasn’t very clear on. So it was the two biggest hurdles. One was to ensure we have got what we wanted from our department, which was exactly that the QAA regulatory side of [name of the Chinese parent university] was flexible. They were largely, at least the way it came to us, interested in accommodating whatever compromise would work in the MOE, and what would work in [name of the UK home institution] ... What I didn’t want was that they would have a bespoke degree in China possibly with modules delivered themselves and then gain access to our final year, coz then there was less control of the quality of students when they come. (Programme director of Economics, UK)

The findings above demonstrate how the UK institutional and departmental level academic managers were influenced by the UK national and institutional quality assurance policies. In addition, within the UK university, key stakeholders from the major departments of the UK university including the programme directors, QA officers, and teaching academics were invited together to negotiate on various practicality issues concerning the partnership programmes in relation to administration, academic teaching, and finance. This was evidenced by the statements of the quality officer. As she said,

We had a representative meeting to consider all of the different issues, different issues that we need to consider getting the programme set up and running, and make sure all the relevant stakeholders involved knew what was happening. So we discussed things. The individual schools looked at the academic syllabus, that kind of thing. We could bring that together to QA to show that they have done the right processes.
subject information is left to schools. We also looked at the financial
arrangements as well. (Quality officer, UK)

To summarise, this section explains how the UK institutional and departmental academic managers were involved within the UK home university in setting up the agreements in the early stage. It can be seen that the UK academic managers were highly affected by the national and institutional quality assurance rules and requirements. However, invisibly, there was also a sense of influences from the market in the background affecting their decision-makings as the UK academic managers were concerned about the Chinese partner’s reputation which is closely linked to the financial opportunities including attracting students. Referring to Clark’s (1983) model, the influence of the market aligns with Clark’s (1983) model, however, the influence of the UK home university on the programme approval is missing.

It is worth noting that in this study, having ‘boundary spanners’ (Tushman and Scanlan, 1981; Williams, 2010) on each side who speak both languages and know both systems well was particularly helpful for developing mutual trust, effective communication structures and commitment between the two institutions during the early phase (Heffernan and Poole, 2005). This was highlighted by the partnership director, a Chinese national who worked in the UK university, who himself served as a boundary spanner in this partnership.

We have one advantage, which is that when anything is ambiguous or not clear, we will communicate. At this point, someone who speaks Chinese like me is particularly important to bridge the communication. My role
sometimes is formal and sometimes informal in order to clarify the misunderstandings between the two sides. (Partnership director, UK)

The findings have aligned with Bordogna (2019) which argues that boundary spanning is useful in building cohesion and commitment between partners and improving transnational higher education partnerships by facilitating resource transmission and mutual communication. This provides an insight for senior higher education managers when developing transnational partnerships, especially in the early stage when there is a strong urgency to build trust and commitment between the two parties.

6.2.2 Seeking Approvals from the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE)

After the agreement was signed up between the two partners, they worked collaboratively to seek formal approvals from the Chinese government. During this process, the UK academic managers suggested that they did not deal with the Chinese MoE directly but only played a supportive role providing relevant documentation when requested by their Chinese partner. The faculty dean on the Chinese side summarised that the fundamental principle for the MoE in new programme approvals was to introduce high quality education resources from the foreign partner. As for the specific requirements, first of all, the government paid attention to the reputation of the foreign institution. This is evidenced by the statement below,

*The fundamental thing for the MOE is to introduce high-quality education resources. The first is to partner with high-quality foreign universities. For example, if the University of Glasgow wants to cooperate with any*
Chinese universities, it will be very easy to get approved because it is a world-class university. (Faculty dean, China)

He (2015) identified that the government was more likely to approve programmes which: 1) cooperate with highly ranked European universities; 2) affiliated with a Chinese university rather than having independent legal person status; and 3) are in the subjects of IT, science, or engineering. It appears that the case study partnership institute had all three characteristics. For example, the UK partner university is a prestigious university and has a high global ranking; the partnership institute is a second-tier college attached to the Chinese parent university, and they offered programmes in chemistry, economics, engineering, and mathematics which are all strong subjects of both universities. The findings in this study have confirmed He (2015)’s observation. As for the reasons why the government has such preferences, it is related to the government’s ambition in boosting its domestic social and economic modernisation and industrialisation through developing transnational education (He, 2015), and its strong ‘catch-up mentality’ when it comes to enhancing the national education capacity in 21st century society (Caruana and Montgomery, 2015b; Montgomery, 2016).

It appears that the government’s ‘Four One Third Rule’ was extremely critical to how the programmes were designed during the early programme preparation stage. The academic managers of both universities have stressed this. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (p.33), the ‘Four One Third Rule’ specifies the amount of resources and inputs from the foreign partner in terms of course and teaching materials, course numbers and teaching hours. It is a rule which is consistent with the government’s fundamental principle of introducing advanced education resources from the foreign partner. However, the responses of the UK and Chinese academic managers suggested that it was very difficult to comply with this
rule given the financial constraints of the two universities, especially because the government does not allow the partners to make profits. The partnership director described the difficulty in complying with the government’s policies.

Although the two partners had good intentions to build quality high, we have to take responsibility for the profits and costs, too. The Chinese policies do not allow making profits. However, we cannot lose money, either’. (Partnership director, UK)

Indeed, on the one hand, the government wants to see the Chinese partner introduce at least one third of teaching materials and teaching hours from the foreign partner, which is resource-intensive; on the other hand, the government put restrictions on student recruitment number and tuition fee standards and did not allow the education partners to make money. This has posed challenges to the partners during practices, as the partnership director stated above, ‘they cannot lose money, either’.

The UK dean of teaching and learning emphasised that there is ambiguity in the government’s ‘Four One Third Rule’ regarding the ‘the number of the core courses of specialities by teachers from the foreign educational institution and the relevant teaching hours, shall be more than one third of all the courses numbers and teaching hours of the Sino-foreign cooperative education project’ (Ministry of Education, 2006). The rule does not specify whether the foreign partner has to send the UK teachers to teach one third of the curriculum or not. As he described,
In terms of the ‘one third rule’, it worries a lot of people. The ‘one third rule’ is that in transnational education project like this, the non-Chinese university has to contribute one third of the teaching. It is a very famous Ministry of Education rule, but nobody understands…Our understanding of it is we don't actually have to send staff to teach one third of curriculum, which is good because we can’t do that for various viable financial reasons. (Dean of teaching and learning, UK)

Thus, the findings suggest that there is a need for the government to clarify the meaning of the ‘Four One Third Rule’. Furthermore, the responses of the partnership director also suggested that there was a need for the Chinese government to provide more specific guidance on setting up tuition fees and student enrollment numbers in this type of second-tier college partnerships, given the diversity of Chinese foreign higher education cooperation. It appears that the existing regulatory framework is not appropriate and ineffective in regulating these newly developed partnerships (Wu, 2003; Xiang, 2005). His original statements are as follows:

As for the [name of the case study partnership institute], it is a second-tier college attached to a Chinese public university and does not have independent legal personal status, which is different from the international branch campuses like University of Nottingham Ningbo and Xi’an Jiaotong Liverpool University, who can charge more fees. The second-tier colleges are faced with strict standards due to the restriction of their legal status… We stick to the Regulation on Implementation of Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools, but China should have more practical policies on some detailed aspects, such as tuition fees standards,
"the student enrolment numbers and so on. It is very difficult to cut it into one size for all institutions to implement because every institution is different. (Partnership director, UK)"

According to the 2003 Regulation, the tuition and its criteria of Chinese foreign cooperative institutions are decided according to the related price issued by the government. In addition, the cooperative institutions cannot add items or elevate criteria without prior permission of the government. The findings confirm the need for designing a new regulatory regime for the increasingly diverse and complex transnational higher education in China, which was also raised by Mok and Xu (2008).

The section above has illustrated how the Chinese government influences quality assurance approaches of the partnership during the process of programme approval application using the method of accreditation through policy regulations and rules. The data shows that the government had influence in those areas, including the foreign partner selection, the types of programmes and disciplines, curriculum and teaching materials, and teaching arrangement. Referring to Clark’s model, the findings align with the influence of the state through political coordination.

### 6.2.3 Developing a Good Brand of Quality

After the programmes were approved by the Chinese government, the two partners, particularly the departmental level programme directors and teaching staff, started to prepare for setting up the programmes and building quality. The partnership director described the high expectations the two partners had for the quality of their partnership. He said that,
We want to create first-class programmes which blend the strength of the two parties and have our own characteristics...We would like to make [name of the partnership institution] very successful and unique, one of the best among China’s domestic partnership institutions. (Partnership director, UK)

Due to the ownership of the programmes, it was the Chinese partner’s major responsibility for developing quality for the first three years. The Chinese managers suggested that their parent university provided substantial financial support to the initial quality construction, such as improving the facilities and infrastructures, recruiting high quality teachers, and promoting marketing activities. While the UK partner contributed more to the development of the programmes such as curriculum and course design, teacher training and quality reviews. For example, in terms of curriculum design, the programme directors at the UK university used the existing curriculum from the UK university as a sample when designing the curriculum for the partnership programmes. They wanted to make sure students cover the same core modules. Then, it was the local individual teachers’ responsibility to make other arrangements about the rest of the materials.

Basically, we looked at our current curriculum and put in exactly the same thing, almost one-to-one mapping, and then the individual lecturers who are teaching specific modules will pass this material to the [name of the local partnership institute] colleagues. (Programme director of Maths, UK)
This sort of curriculum mapping practice is very common in transnational programmes nowadays. Due to the credit transfer policy requirements, often the foreign university feels the need of controlling student learning outcomes by controlling learning materials and curriculum. In this case, the Chinese partner was very willing to borrow the curriculum materials from the UK partner institution and vice-versa, the UK partner was very willing to provide the Chinese with the materials. In practice, the Chinese introduced four fifth of the curriculum from the UK institution. However, the responses of the Deputy Dean suggested that in reality, it was very difficult to borrow the UK curriculum directly and transplant it in China because the Chinese academic managers had to take the Chinese government’s education requirements into account at the same time. In the end, they only borrowed the core elements of these materials and made some adjustments to fit into their local contexts. As the deputy dean of student affairs stated,

*I think if we just borrow it directly and transplant it here, we will face difficulties. Because for example, in their education, they have far more limited contact hours than we have. For one module, they only have 20 contact hours, but they ask the students to have 200 hours for independent study. Here we require students to have 96 contact hours, but we do not have requirements for students to have so many independent study hours. So this is the first thing we met some kind of difficulty. On the other side, we had to meet requirements of the MOE, and the Chinese tradition, and then if we follow directly, it doesn’t work. We need to make some adjustments...The most important thing is we borrow the core of education from them. We will make adjustments and try our best to make use of the collaboration. Borrow the good things and help our education to grow.* (Deputy dean of student affairs, China)
In the aspect of teacher arrangements, the data show that teachers teaching at the partnership institute consisted of: 1) Chinese teachers borrowed from other departments of the parent university; 2) UK fly-in and fly-out teachers sent from the UK partner university; 3) and international teachers jointly employed by the two institutions who were based at the local institute. There were complex reasons why the teacher arrangement was made in this way. First of all, the partnership institute was a second-tier college affiliated with the Chinese parent university, and the programmes it offered were also built on the basis of the existing programmes of the parent university from other departments. As such, it relied heavily on the Chinese parent university supplying teacher resources. Secondly, as indicated before (Section 6.2.2), the Chinese government required transnational partnerships to have at least one third of the teaching hours conducted by the foreign teachers. Despite this, due to the financial practicality issue, the two partners could not afford to send the UK teachers to teach for a long period. What they did instead was to send UK teachers to teach twice a year for only two weeks and employed international teachers who were based locally to shoulder the majority of the teaching. It can be said that given the conditions, the two partners came up with a rather practical solution. Meanwhile, in order to assure the quality of the locally-employed international teachers, the UK academic managers also sat in the interview panels to give opinions. This was seen from the comments of the UK dean of teaching and learning.

We are not doing that [sending UK teachers once a term to do a lot of teaching] because we trust [name of the Chinese local institution] to employ people on our behalf. And we know that because we have been in the interview panels. We have made a few appointments. And we assume that they will not appoint someone that we don’t like. (Dean of Teaching and Learning, UK)
The section above presents how the curriculum was designed and how the teacher arrangements were made in the case study partnership institute. The findings have demonstrated the forces of the government, the UK home university, and the Chinese parent university influencing quality assurance approaches in the areas of curriculum design and teacher arrangements. And, among them all, it appears that the government’s influence was the stronger than that of the two partner universities. Referring to the triangle of coordination model, however, the forces of the UK home university and Chinese parent university were not included in Clark’s (1983) model.

The data show that the partnership institute had two major dilemmas during quality development. The first was to recruit high quality teachers. For example, one UK teacher trainer indicated that their Chinese counterparts struggled to recruit experienced EAP (English for Academic Purpose) teachers possibly because the Chinese parent university was not that attractive in terms of the working conditions or the university ranking.

The reality however is that [name of the partnership institute] have struggled to recruit international teachers three times. They find it difficult to get quality candidates or if they do get quality candidates, they have turned down the offers of the work. The result of three recruitment sessions was they have only managed to recruit two or three teachers from the UK. One of the teachers is quite young but he’s got good experience...And the other international teachers got much less experience and so may not be suited to that role either. (English language teacher trainer, UK)
The second difficulty was to attract high quality students. Although the Chinese parent university is a Tier 1 university (not ‘211’ project), which means that students applying for the transnational programmes have to meet the minimum standard of tier 1 university in X province of that year, however, as the faculty dean stated, they were faced with the dilemma of recruiting high quality students. This was because, on the one hand, their institute was still very young and did not have the same high reputation as the top 10 universities, and consequently high-quality students may not want to study there. On the other hand, the tuition fees of transnational programmes are higher than that of non-collaborative ones. That was another factor, whether parents and students could afford such level of tuition fees. On top of that, the government has put restrictions on tuition fee standards for second-tier partnership colleges. Although the two parties wanted to recruit better quality students and charge higher tuition fees, they had to take the market demands and government policy regulations into account when deciding on tuition fees and student entry requirements. In the end, they had to lower their original expectations on student entry requirements and tuition fees, hoping to recover the cost in the near future. The following statements of the respondents have evidenced the underlying contradictions.

*We feel after all, it is a new creature. Many good students are not willing to apply to our institution. Therefore, our student quality is not very high.*

*We are faced with a dilemma that tuition fees are higher than other departments which make it difficult to recruit good students. Apart from these, many students who would like to study in [name of the Chinese parent university] do not necessarily want to come to the [partnership institute]. Some are very determined to apply for the [partnership institute], but their grades are not high enough. I hope we can surpass other colleges in a few years’ time.* (Faculty dean, China)
The question is how much they are going to charge if the students are not coming to the UK? Can they charge the same tuition fees as here? I'm not sure. If not, is it sustainable to pay the first 3 years? And the two universities have to get something out of it, right? They are not just paying the staff members. Then it depends on how many students we are thinking to have, 50 students? Are we able to recruit so many students? Are we able to keep them to the very end? So, if you think about it in China, there are a number of similar programmes, and if it is Tsinghua, Fudan University, I’d think about it in a different way. So, it’s up to the parents’ expectations. They are not paying a small amount of money. You can imagine [name of the Chinese local institution] itself. You need to think about what their entry requirement is. And on top of that, you need to think about how many parents are able to afford that. And if they are able to afford that amount of tuition fees, what are their expectations? What is the true gaokao entry level you can set for this institute? I am not sure. I think it will not be at exactly the same level as the standard level. (Programme director of Maths, UK)

What the two respondents meant was that it was very difficult to set up an appropriate tuition fee level for the partnership institute because they had to take many factors, such as the university's reputation and affordability of the programmes for the Chinese parents and students into consideration. During this period, according to the partnership director, although the UK university requested their Chinese partner to set up threshold on student English entry requirements, it was very difficult to achieve this because the Chinese partner was worried this might cause them to lose many potential applicants. Thus, the UK partner had to stick to what the Chinese did. This was an interesting finding because it
showed that faced with the Chinese local contexts, the UK and Chinese partners had to make a compromise when deciding on student entry requirements. Linking to Clark’s model, the findings have reflected the conflicts between the government’s policy requirements and the two partners’ financial interest on the matter of deciding on student entry requirements, which also influenced the micro level in terms of the calibre of the students engaging in the courses.

To summarise, the above section presented the difficulties of recruiting high quality students and teachers and has highlighted the challenges of quality development for the case study partnership institute under the current Chinese national and local contexts. On the one hand, they had to comply with the government’s policy restrictions; on the other, they had to take the local contexts into consideration. It was very difficult for them to find the right balance. The findings suggest that there is a need for government policy makers and university managers to pay attention to how to support this type of partnerships in the future.

With checks and balances, the two partners held a positive attitude towards the future, hoping to achieve fruitful results in the long term. The following section presents how the two partners were assuring/ improving quality in the delivery phase.
6.3 The Delivery Phase

Huang (2006) observed that in many transnational partnerships, after the programmes were approved and put into operation, the major responsibility for quality assurance fell on to individual institutions. Often, faculty members at departmental or programme level are expected to be responsible for the quality of teaching and learning, while at the same time, there are occasional checks by inspectors sent by the Ministry of Education or other administrative authorities (p.31). Such observations are confirmed by this study. Indeed, entering into the delivery phase, it appears that it was the Chinese local staff members who took the major responsibility for delivering the quality of teaching and learning. Their UK partner only shared part of responsibility. Meanwhile, the local staff members had to stick to the Chinese national quality regulatory frameworks, ready for the occasional checks by the inspectors sent by the Ministry of Education. The following section presents how the key stakeholders were engaged in quality assurance in more detail.

6.3.1 The UK Partner’s Engagement in Delivering Quality

As stated before, due to the ownership of the partnership, it was the Chinese partner’s major responsibility for quality assurance in the legal sense. The UK partner was responsible for quality only when the Chinese students came to the UK for their final year studies. Despite this, the data show that the UK partner played an active role in the development of quality of the partnership. For example, from the managerial perspective, in order to govern relevant issues, a ‘joint governance board’ was created in which 3 UK managers (i.e. the UK dean of teaching and learning, quality officer, and partnership director) were members. Monthly video meetings were held between the two parties to
discuss issues they encountered during the process of collaboration. In addition, frequent emails were also exchanged back and forth between the academic managers when they had questions. The faculty dean indicated that it was a very useful way to learn from the UK university’s management experiences by exchanging opinions with the UK academic managers. The findings reflect the influences of the UK academic managers on the management of this partnership.

We have video meetings with [name of the UK institution] colleagues every month to learn from their good management experiences...After all, they have a history spanning one to two hundred years, we have just a few decades’ experience, and the [partnership institute] is just a few years old. (Faculty dean, China)

It appears that during the delivery phase, it was the departmental level programme directors, teacher trainers, and teachers who were more actively engaged in quality delivery than the institutional academic managers. Teachers, including the programme directors were arranged to teach locally twice a year over a period of two weeks. The UK teachers suggested that while they were in China, they focused on familiarising the students with the UK teaching styles and methods to prepare them early for the UK studies. Additionally, the UK teachers also sat in on some local teachers’ class to observe their teaching and gave feedback to them. Apart from this, they would also check student examination papers and assessment work to make sure that students were assessed using the same standards as they do in the UK. In the Chinese faculty dean’s words, ‘the UK teachers were mainly responsible for quality evaluation and reviews while they were there’.

It appears that the UK teachers were treated as mentors or supervisors of quality to their
Chinese counterparts. To assist students’ learning while the UK teachers were not in China, there was also an agreement made between the two partners that teachers must respond to the students’ emails in 15 days. Despite this, the data shows that there was little interaction between the UK teachers and the local teachers as well as students as the programme directors indicated that they did not have much knowledge about how the local teachers and students were progressing in their studies due to inefficient communication over a long distance. There is a need for the two partners to create a platform to facilitate more communication and to be better informed about the local situations.

In addition, some experienced teacher trainers were sent to China to deliver training to the local teachers in the beginning when the college was just open. The UK teacher trainers focused on capacity building of the local English language teachers to improve their teaching skills of English for Academic Purposes. However, one teacher trainer pointed out one problem of the training that arose due to the lack of settlement of the teacher arrangements in the early stage, was that many teachers who had been in the training did not remain teaching for the partnership as they were originally English teachers from the language department teaching College English. This resulted in a waste of time and human resources. Thus, the findings suggest that in future, in order to increase the efficiency of quality development, it would be helpful if the two partners could be clearer about the arrangements of teachers in the early stage before they arrange training.

Notably, the UK teacher trainers also raised two areas of new training needs. The first was to pay attention to the training needs of the local Chinese subject teachers who had to teach in the medium of English language. It was a very interesting point to make. As one teacher trainer believed, it is a challenge for the local Chinese subject teachers whose first language is not English to convey the essence of their ideas in English fully during their
lectures. He questioned "are they sufficiently trained or aware of their language? Does that lecturer think actually my pronunciation is not very good? How do they understand it? Does that even occur to them to go ahead and lecture or maybe at the middle area, there will be some level of communication not happening? How do they get around of that?". Indeed, it appears that these teachers’ training needs were neglected. There is a need to provide training for the Chinese subject teachers preparing them better for teaching in English.

The second training issue was delivering training to the foreign subject teachers, including the UK fly-in and fly-out teachers who were teaching in the language of English. That was because, as one teacher trainer believed, the native English teachers might be aware of how to convey their ideas more effectively to the Chinese students whose first language is not English. There is a need for the teachers to adjust their language according to the students’ needs. As he stated,

It’s not just we need people who can speak perfect English. Even if you are the native speaker of English, if you work with international students, you have to adjust your language...Does he know how to communicate to the audiences who do not have English as their first language? That’s completely a different thing. If you put that to a non-experienced teacher, a native speaker of English, in an English classroom teaching in English for five minutes, she will see the problem because they are using language students cannot possibly understand...So there is a training gap there.
(English language teacher trainer, UK)
The two training areas for development proposed by the English language teacher trainers were thought-provoking. Indeed, little attention has been paid to the learning needs of the foreign and local subject teachers who are teaching in transnational programmes where English is used as the lingua franca. The findings provide an insight into the training demands of teachers in transnational partnerships.

Furthermore, the teacher trainers (i.e. two English language teacher trainers and the academic practice developer) indicated that they had little information about how the local teachers actually teach after the training due to geographical distance. This finding shows that there is a need to build a platform for the teachers on both sides to exchange information and share experiences more frequently in the future. They were concerned that one or two training sessions is not sufficient to change the local teachers’ well-established teaching habits, and thus expressed their wishes to deliver more on-going training in the future. This was evidenced by the quotation below.

*I think one of the concerns is we have only seen IELTS teachers teach, so there is a big difference between the training workshop and what happens in the classroom. We have very little data from the classroom of how these teachers actually teach...I think the other concern is they have an established habit of teaching in the classroom, and skills and expertise of course. But to change to a different style of teaching is not something that will be easily facilitated by one or two training sessions. I think it has to be supported by things like appropriate materials and by on-going training as I say to introduce new programmes. (English language teacher trainer, UK)*
To summarise, the section above demonstrates how the UK staff members were engaged in quality assurance processes during the delivery phase, serving as a mentor to the Chinese partner during this stage. The data has reflected the influences of the UK staff members (i.e., institutional academic managers, the departmental and programme level programme directors, teachers and teacher trainers) on various issues, such as quality management, delivery of courses, and teacher professional development. However, different from the pre-delivery stage in which they were placing the UK home university’s relevant policy regulations as the top priority, they had more freedom of decision-making on how to improve quality of learning and teaching according to their professional expertise. Linking to the theoretical model of this study, however, the important role of the staff members of foreign partner institutions is not acknowledged.

Throughout, there is also a sense that the UK staff members were committed to developing this partnership successfully and sustainably. The UK partner cared about student learning experience and their feedback. It is hard to say that this is for the benefits of maintaining their university reputation and attracting more students to come to the UK. In this sense, the findings have implied the influences of the market on the UK staff members’ engagement in quality practices, motivating them to contribute to the successful development of this partnership.

6.3.2 The Local Staff Members’ Participation

As stated above, it was the Chinese partner who was responsible for quality assurance on a daily basis. Indeed, the data shows that on the Chinese side, the local academic managers and teachers worked collaboratively to make sure the programmes are run smoothly. The
Chinese faculty dean made a joke about his role in managing the partnership which illustrated well the relationship between the two partner universities and the partnership college. He said,

*[The UK home university] and [the Chinese parent university] are a newly married couple and their first son is the [partnership college]. They need to learn how to get along with each other. I often say to our president that I would like to do this and that. As long as he approves, things are very easy to implement. (Faculty dean, China)*

The quotation indicates that the managers in the partnership college had to make sure the programmes are run in accordance with the two partner universities’ expectations. The local managers suggested that they were trying to combine the methods of quality assurance in the UK and in China together, hoping to make their quality stronger.

Section 6.3.1 has demonstrated in what ways the staff members from the UK home university influenced quality assurance in the partnership. Equally, the data shows that the Chinese parent university also had a role in assuring quality in this partnership institute. According to the party secretary, due to the fact that the partnership belonged to a second-tier college affiliated with the Chinese parent university, it had to stick to the university’s quality assurance rules. For example, there were teacher supervisors (*daxue dudao*) coming to observe the classes. Teachers could get more pension if their teaching met the university’s evaluation criteria. This had created high pressure on the local teachers according to their responses. The findings highlight the influence of the Chinese parent university, which is not included in Clark’s (1983) model. Moreover, although the
partnership institute was subject to the quality assurance regimes of the Chinese parent university, it appears that the influence of the Chinese parent university was not prominent. Instead, the local academic managers and teachers in the partnership institute were given autonomy to take relevant quality measures according to their specific needs.

Within the partnership institute, the major responsibilities of the managers were clearly defined. Moving towards the delivery phase, the data show that the focus of the local staff was shifting from complying with relevant national or institutional quality regulations and rules to the improvement of student learning experiences. The local academic managers worked collaboratively to govern the daily key issues related to quality of learning and teaching. The following statement of the faculty dean has evidenced this point.

*To be honest, education quality cannot be relied on by only one person. I am the Dean, the first responsibility person. We also have a deputy dean who is responsible for student affairs and another deputy dean for international cooperation. Meanwhile, we have the party secretary monitoring us. Every Monday, the first thing we do is to discuss about education quality. Everybody shares with their good ideas. (Faculty dean, China)*

Teachers are at the forefront of quality delivery through teaching and learning activities. The data shows that thus far, the local teachers were trusted by both sides of the partnership to deliver the courses. They were less involved in the management aspect of quality assurance. For example, the local English language teachers commented,
We have a lot of freedom and there aren’t really such things (referring to QA rules and regulations). Our job is basically the wing of management. (English language teacher, China)

I get advice from the Chemistry teacher and the Economy teacher about what students are doing in the class. But I don’t feel I have anyone directly above who is managing or controlling me, which is great in some ways. (English language teacher, China)

This finding is different from that reached by Dobos (2011), in whose study the local teachers complained that they were not treated as professional equals and had a master-slave relationship with their foreign counterparts. Rather, it appears that there was a sense of a community of practices (Keay, May and O’Mahony, 2014) among the local managers and teachers that they supported each other when they encountered any questions. For example, the English language teachers suggested that they had weekly meetings every Monday morning in which teachers joined together and exchanged ideas or questions concerning their teaching. Often the experienced teachers would give feedback to younger teachers during the meetings. Similarly, the foreign subject teachers indicated that they often discussed students’ learning issues together in an informal way in the office as well. These discussions were deemed very helpful for these teachers to adjust their teaching to better support the students. The findings imply that there was also a strong sense of commitment among the local staff members.

However, the data collected from the foreign subject teachers show that there is a need to pay attention to the needs of the local foreign teachers as it appears that they were not very sure about the existing quality assurance rules and regulations in the partnership institute and the Chinese students’ learning habits. Their lack of knowledge about the local
situations may hinder the effectiveness of their delivery of quality during their work. For example, one or two local foreign teachers were confused why the local students were not very active in answering the teachers’ questions in classroom. They later discovered that it was because these students were not used to interacting with the teachers due to the Chinese traditional education style and pattern of interactions. Hence, this indicates that it would be helpful if the local university could provide some support for newly recruited international teachers to help them adapt to the Chinese teaching environments. Moreover, one subject teacher also pointed out that it was very difficult to teach the Chinese students in the UK style when meeting their UK partner’s expectations considering the Chinese students’ unique learning characteristics. Hence, in reality, they were sometimes faced with the question of what is the most appropriate way of delivering teaching.

Additionally, the faculty dean pointed out one common problem that both partners faced, i.e. teachers in both partnering universities were paying more attention to research rather than teaching, which made it more challenging to improve the quality of learning and teaching in their joint programmes. He suggested that it is important that higher education managers develop a positive and participatory quality culture in which teachers are committed to quality development.

The section above has explained how the local staff members were engaged in quality assurance activities in the delivery phase. The findings have demonstrated the influences of the local academic managers and teachers who were actively engaged in managing or delivering the courses well in the partnership institute. Linking to Clark’s (1983) model, the influences of the local staff members were reflections of the influences of academic oligarchy.
6.3.3 The Government’s Quality Evaluation

Apart from meeting the Chinese parent university’s requirements, the data show that the local academic managers also had to prepare for the government’s occasional quality evaluations. As the faculty dean and deputy dean of international collaboration indicated, they had to submit quality reports to the government every year. The government would look at the documentations and records to check whether the programmes are run according to the pre-stated promises. As the faculty dean suggested, the fundamental goal was to make sure the Chinese partner has introduced high quality resources in practice.

*We need to write an annual report to them, for example, how many foreign teachers have been here, how much high-quality education resources we have introduced, and what are these high-quality resources? You cannot make things up because there are records on the teachers’ passport on their departure and arrival dates. In a word, it is to see whether you have really introduced high-quality education resources.*

*(Faculty dean, China)*

The deputy dean of international collaboration proudly indicated that their partnership institute has been rated as one of the demonstrative Sino-foreign cooperative partnerships in their province during the quality evaluations of that year by the Ministry of Education. The local managers suggested that the government’s quality evaluation was meaningful because it could help them to reflect on themselves and identify the weakness they had. The findings suggested that the during the delivery phase, the partnership institute was
subject to the government’s quality reviews every year. The government used the method of quality inspection to monitor the progress of the case study partnership. With reference to Clark’s theoretical model, the findings regarding the government’s quality evaluation align with the influences of the state.

6.3.4 The Student and Parents’ Engagement in Quality Assurance

Students and parents are often considered as consumers of higher education in the Western countries, for example, the UK, US, and Australia where higher education institutions belong to private entities after the cut-down of public funding from the government (Douglas and Douglas, 2006). Because of this, nowadays many Western higher education institutions pay high attention to student satisfaction and student engagement in quality assurance activities to maintain a good reputation (Elassy, 2013). In this study, it appears that students and parents also had a role in engaging in quality assurance development of the programmes. For example, they were invited to the meetings organised by the managers to give opinions about the education services they received, particularly in the early stage of programme delivery. The faculty dean, who organised meetings with the students and the parents explained how the students and parents were engaged in quality assurance.

First, I usually meet our students and invite them to speak. Second, our teachers are very responsible. They work till very late in the evening to mentor them. They give extra office hours to students so that they can approach the teachers easily. This is the same as the foreign university to help the students at least once or twice a week. Third, parents have established close connections with us. This is the Chinese characteristic.
Parents play an active role in monitoring quality assurance of our college. We have three times of meetings each year with the parents. We call it the ‘parents-university meeting’. During the meetings, our university leaders and I would report what we have done in the past year. Then, we asked the parents to raise questions on our work and give us feedback. (Faculty dean, China)

The findings suggest that the local academic managers and teachers had devised ways to listen to the feedback and views of the students and parents. They invited students and parents to serve as a third party to monitor the development of their institute. This has shown that the local academic managers and teachers were very concerned about their institute’s reputation and wanted to earn more recognition from the public. The faculty dean further added that they have created a Wechat platform in which parents could know their children’s study status and the latest movements of the institute.

We have a public account of parents committee. For example, we had a speech competition yesterday. Parents could see what was happening from there. At a time, we had over 6,000 people in the Wechat group all invited by parents and parents’ friends and relatives...News on Wechat is written by the students themselves and parents can all read it. (Faculty dean, China)

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66 WeChat, weixin in Chinese, is a widely used social media communication tool in China. It is equivalent to the Western social media apps such as WhatsApp or Facebook.
It was rather a creative idea that the local managers made use of the widely-used social media tool, i.e. Wechat, to bring the parents into the quality development of the institute. This was a Chinese characteristic phenomenon which was deeply related to the Chinese traditional Confucian familial culture, in which parents have a say in decision-making relating to a children’s choice of transnational study and academic well-being (Bodycott and Lai, 2012). From another perspective, it was also a way of marketing as parents can spread the word to other parents in their surroundings. However, the students believed that their university was not capturing the essence of quality in student learning but was focusing too much on marketing and developing the brand. As one of the student participants complained,

*Although it is a cooperative institution, there is still very much an atmosphere of the Chinese administrative thing, especially how it needs to take the marketing effect into account in our first year. It is just for marketing at the end of the day but not for our improvement in learning abilities genuinely. So, it is sacrificing our learning abilities in order to maintain the brand of the institute. Thus, in the beginning, they had a lot of eye-catching activities, and although there existed some very useful quality assurance activities, some of our classmates feel not very satisfied with it. (Student participant, China)*

This finding indicates that transnational education partnerships must not forget to pay attention to student learning and improvement after the marketing activities and student recruitment. Otherwise, quality assurance will easily fall into an empty promise. Moreover, although the student participants suggested that their academic managers and teachers had
collected their views, many of the problems were not addressed. There existed obstacles to change the situations in practice.

Student evaluation on teacher performance was a part of the Chinese parent university’s quality assurance scheme which was linked to teachers’ professional performance and promotion. The student participants said that they were asked to fill in the student evaluation forms to rate their teachers. Although seemingly, the student evaluation system provided an opportunity for the students to give their opinions and views on the quality of teaching and learning of their teachers, however, the responses of the student participants suggested that they did not think this system effective. The student participants indicated that they did not trust this system very much because it was not anonymous at all. They were afraid to give honest feedback to their teachers. They further stated that even though they had given honest opinions, these opinions were not paid much attention by their managers. Thus, many of the problems still remained not addressed. Overall, there is a sense that completing the student evaluation forms was more like playing the ‘game’ for the local students. As one of the student participants stated,

For the teacher performance evaluation, we generally think it not very helpful because our feedback is not paid much attention to by the teachers. They don’t make changes according to our feedback. We just tick the boxes randomly. (Student participant, China)

The findings suggest that although students were engaged in quality assurance processes in this partnership institute, their role and level of influences were very limited. The existing
quality assurance regime designed for the students was not substantially helpful for improving the quality of teaching and learning yet.

This section discusses how the students and parents were engaged in quality assurance activities. The findings show that in this context, students and parents took an active part in supporting the development of quality in this partnership institute, offering feedback to their managers and teachers. The influences of the individual students and parents are indications of the influences of the market as the student and parent involvement links to spreading the reputation of the partner institute among other parents which in turn may influence future student recruitment also seems relevant to the market.

6.4 The Enhanced Phase: Stronger Quality Control from the UK Home University

As mentioned in Section 6.1, at the time of the data collection, the enhanced phase ‘4+0’ programmes were not running yet. Thus, there was limited information about how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance in the enhanced phase. The data shows that in the enhanced phase when the ‘4+0’ programmes begin, the UK partner university will play a stronger role in assuring quality. As the UK dean of teaching and learning suggested, they will be the primary directors of quality assurance and be responsible for the consequences if anything goes wrong. They will put tighter control on student learning processes and outcomes, making sure the curriculum, teaching materials, the way teaching is delivered, and student examination and assessment outcomes are equivalent with the UK programmes. The following quotation of the UK dean of teaching and learning provided a detail introduction of how the UK partners will be engaged in quality assurance in the enhanced phase.
From September, our role will be much more enhanced. We will be the primary directors. It will be our programme. Largely it will be delivered by the staff at [name of the case study partnership institute], but it will be our programme and they will be our students. So, we will have a bigger role for this. As I said, what do we do if things go wrong? And that has implications for us. Examination circumstances, academic engagement, policy academic misconducts, students who are unwell or cheat in exams... All those things will become our responsibility. And we need to look at the assessment as well. We will be setting the assessments. Probably our local colleagues will be marking. We will look at their marking and moderate. Our external examiners will have an interest in the outcomes of the assessments. So, it’s much more intensive. (Dean of teaching and learning, UK)

The reason why the UK partner will have a stronger role in quality assurance in the enhanced phase is that they will have the ownership the ‘4+0’ programmes from the beginning when students are recruited. In other words, students will belong to the UK partner university and have a UK university email account, although they will be receiving training in the local partnership institute. The findings suggest that there is a difference between different types of the partnership programmes in the mechanisms of quality assurance due to the ownership of the programmes. The statement of the programme director of Engineering has further confirmed the more prominent role of the UK partner during the enhanced phase.

[In terms of the ‘4+0’ programmes], so all modules descriptions, for example, have to be based on the [UK] model. They are owned [by the
UK institution]. Sounds sort of authoritarian, doesn’t it? But because of that type of level, all of the assessment, the evaluation, and the modules will follow the [UK] system. So, whatever [the Senior Quality Officer] publishes as good practices for [UK home institution] will have to apply to the [local partnership institute] complying with the standards. (Programme director of Engineering, UK)

This section discusses how the stakeholders are engaged in quality assurance in the enhanced phase. The data show that in the enhanced phase, the UK home university will play a critical role in influencing how quality is assured in the ‘4+0’ programmes, requiring the local staff members to stick to the UK home university’s policy regulations. The power relations between the UK and the local staff members will change, consequently. Again, linking to Clark’s (1983) model, the findings of this section highlight the influences of the UK home university from the meso dimension, which does not align with the model.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter explores how key stakeholders were engaged in quality assurance activities by reviewing the development process of quality assurance in this partnership institute. Section 6.2 focuses on discussing the key stakeholders’ engagement in the pre-delivery phase. The findings have identified that the following stakeholders, namely, the UK home university (see Section 6.2.1), the Chinese government (see Section 6.2.2), and the market (see Section 6.2.3) had important influences on quality assurance during this phase. It appears that during this stage, on the one hand, the two partners had to comply with the national and institutional quality assurance policy regulations; on the other, they were also
taken the demands of the market into consideration. Compromises were made between the two partners when faced with the government’s policy requirements to develop contextually appropriate solutions.

Section 6.3 presents the findings regarding how the key stakeholder were engaged in quality assurance activities in the delivery phase. The findings suggest that the UK partner, specifically the individual staff members from the UK home university (see Section 6.3.1), the local individual staff members (see Section 6.3.2), the government (see Section 6.3.3), and the students and parents (see Section 6.3.4) participated in quality assurance activities. During this stage, the focus of attention was shifting from meeting the government’s and the institution’s policy regulations to improving the quality of student learning experiences. It appears that it is individuals, namely, the flying faculty members of the UK home university, the local faculty members, and students and parents at the micro level that were engaged in quality assurance activities actively. In particular, the faculty members between both partner institutions worked collaboratively to contribute to the improvement of quality in daily learning and teaching activities.

The last section, Section 6.4 suggests that in the enhanced phase, the UK home university became the most influential stakeholder exerting tighter control on the academic standards and practices of the ‘4+0’ programmes.

To summarise, Section 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 in this chapter have identified that quality assurance mechanisms of this partnership institute were very complex. There are multiple stakeholders who were engaged in quality assurance development processes from different dimensions. At the macro level, the key stakeholders are the Chinese government and the market; at the meso level, the key stakeholders refer to the two partner institutions, i.e., the
UK home university and the Chinese parent university; and at the micro level, the individuals took an active part in quality assurance activities, including the UK faculty members, the local staff, and the students and parents. Linking to Clark’s (1983) framework, the findings regarding the influences of the Chinese government align with the force of the ‘state’; the influences of the market, like an invisible hand in the background and the individual students and parents are in line with the force of the ‘market’; and the individual faculty members including the academic managers and teachers of both institutions are consistent with Clark’s (1983) notion of ‘academic oligarchy’. The influences of the two partner institutions, i.e. the UK home university and the Chinese parent university are not indicated in Clark’s (1983) framework. A new model of the stakeholder engagement in quality assurance in this transnational partnership is developed in Chapter 7 by pulling out the key findings of Chapter 5 and 6.
Chapter 7 Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings of this thesis and addresses the research questions. The theoretical and practical contribution of this study is discussed. The last section outlines the reflections on the research process and provides suggestions for future research.

7.2 Key Findings and Issues to Discuss

This study aims to gain a deep understanding of the operating quality assurance mechanisms in the case study institute. Specifically, it aims to investigate the influences of the key stakeholders from both parties on quality assurance approaches. Additionally, in order to better understand the roles and engagement of the key stakeholders, this study also explores the UK and Chinese staff members’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance. The findings of this study provide an insight into the complexities of quality assurance development in transnational higher education. This section draws out the key findings of this study with regards to the research questions proposed in Chapter 1 and discusses the major issues that emerged during the processes of quality assurance practices. Moreover, by pulling out the key findings, this section also discusses how the different influences of the stakeholders are linked to Clark’s (1983) model, for example, in what ways they are consistent with the model or not, if not, then, what is missing and needs to be developed.
7.2.1 Stakeholders’ Perceptions of the Concepts of Quality and Quality Assurance

Although there is an extensive body of existing literature on the concepts of quality and quality assurance (e.g. Harvey and Green, 1993; Kleijnen et al., 2011; Abidin, 2015; Darojat, Nilson and Kaufman, 2015), there is little focus on the stakeholders’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance in the context of transnational higher education. Chapter 5 focused on examining the perceptions of the stakeholders on quality and quality assurance on both sides of the case study partnership. Specifically speaking, it aims to explore what the concepts of quality and quality assurance mean for different groups of staff members and identify the similarities and differences between the two parties. The findings help to address the first specific research question of this study, i.e. how do the key stakeholders (specifically referring to the staff members of both partner institutions) perceive the concepts of quality and quality assurance in a transnational partnership? With the findings identified from the data, a summary of the stakeholders’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance on both the UK and Chinese sides is presented in the table below.
Table 7-1 The UK and Chinese Stakeholders' Perceptions of Quality and Quality Assurance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic managers (institutional level)</th>
<th>The UK side</th>
<th>The Chinese side</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistency in academic standards and comparability in student assessment; financial sustainability; student readiness for the UK studies; teacher development; →Influences of the UK home university, academic professionals, and the market.</td>
<td>Investment, resources, and expertise; reputation; student cultivation (graduate attributes); teacher development; →Influences of the government, market, Chinese parent university, and academic professionals</td>
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The findings suggest that differences existed among the different groups of stakeholders within the UK home university. Different groups of stakeholders perceived the concepts of quality and quality assurance focusing on different issues under their specific circumstances. This finding agrees with Kleijnen et al. (2011) and Vann (2012) which indicated that individuals have different focuses and priorities when it comes to quality in higher education. Specifically, on the UK side, it was evident that the institutional level academic managers such as the dean of teaching and learning, and the quality officer were concerned with protecting the UK home university’s legitimacy and reputation the most given the external competitive higher education environment. They looked at quality and quality assurance from the university’s strategic development perspective. For them, above all, collaborating with the Chinese partner provides an opportunity to attract more overseas students. This finding is consistent with those of Hou, Montgomery and McDowell (2014).
who suggested that the UK higher education institutions are largely driven by the goal of potentially great financial rewards in transnational higher education. Another thought-provoking point was among the UK staff members, it appears that the institutional academic managers did not differentiate the concepts of quality and quality assurance. They equated quality with the necessity of implementing quality assurance regulations and controlling academic standards. This has implied the predominant influence of the UK home university on the managers’ perceptions. In addition, it is relevant to stress the important influence of the market on the UK academic managers who aimed to create a high reputation for this partnership and financial sustainability.

Compared to the institutional academic managers, the departmental and programme level programme directors were less concerned about the university’s strategies, focusing more on the practical academic and pedagogic issues of quality assurance. In addition, their perceptions of quality and quality assurance contained richer meanings, including seeking consistency in academic standards and comparability in student learning outcomes, preparing the students for the UK studies, and empowering the local teachers. On the one hand, these programme directors and teachers were aware of the necessity of complying with the university’s policy regulations. Thus, they felt the need to make sure there was consistency and comparability in academic standards between the two institutions. On the other hand, as education professionals themselves, they had a genuine care about the students’ academic and intellectual development. The findings have highlighted that at the lower level, the stakeholders’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance were influenced by multiple layers of forces, namely, the UK home university, and academic professionals. However, for the departmental and programme level stakeholders, the level of influences from the UK home university and academic professionals were stronger than the market force. The differences in the institutional and departmental and programme level were attributed to the specific roles they had.
It is highlighted that the UK programme directors’ multiple perspectives of quality and quality assurance. It appears that they had a more comprehensive view of quality and quality assurance compared to the institutional managers and the programme level teachers. This has not been suggested in any empirical studies yet. It would be meaningful and helpful to include the middle-level stakeholders such as the programme directors in group discussions about quality development in future partnerships.

On the Chinese side, differences also existed between the academic managers and the local teachers in their perceptions of quality and quality assurance. For example, it is seen that the managers stressed the importance of developing students into useful talents for society and introducing advanced education resources from the foreign partner to improve themselves. The reason that the managers were more concerned about cultivating the students and enhancing their institution’s education competitiveness was linked to the Chinese government’s political demands. The findings have highlighted the strong influences of the Chinese government on the local managers’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance. Whereas, the teachers’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance were focused more on the issues of student learning processes. The level of the government’s political influences was less strong for them. Instead, they had more freedom to decide what quality is and how to deliver it according to their individual knowledge and expertise.

The study also shows that the two partners shared similar interests in developing a high reputation for their partnership, gaining financial benefits, and improving the teachers and the students. These shared interests have helped lay a common ground for the two parties to collaborate. Nevertheless, although the two partners both had a concern about student development, their specific focuses of student development differed due to the different
roles. There is a need to be aware of the differences that exist between higher education partners when they cooperate with each other.

Understanding the perceptions of the different groups of staff members of both parties is critical to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of quality assurance practices. However, there is little literature reviewing the foreign and Chinese stakeholders’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance in transnational higher education partnerships. Moreover, there appears to be no studies that have been conducted before to compare the similarities and differences between the UK and Chinese stakeholders’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance. The findings of the study provide a holistic understanding of different groups of the UK and Chinese stakeholders’ perspectives of quality and quality assurance in a Sino-UK transnational partnership context. Future partners should be aware of the underlying differences in transnational higher education collaboration as well as the rationales behind the differences.

7.2.2 Stakeholders’ Roles and Engagement in Quality Assurance Processes

Chapter 6 focused on exploring how the key stakeholders were engaged in quality assurance processes in this transnational partnership. The findings of this chapter address the specific research questions proposed in Chapter 1 (See p.7), namely:

- What approaches do the key stakeholders use to ensure quality in this case study partnership?
- What roles do the key stakeholders play during the quality assurance processes?
- What factors influence stakeholders’ engagement in quality assurance practices?
Drawing on the findings of Chapter 6, the following will explain the approaches each stakeholder to ensure quality, the roles of each stakeholders, and the key factors that influenced these stakeholders’ engagement.

In the pre-delivery phase, first of all, the market was a strong force that motivated the two partners to cooperate. This is shown in Chapter 5 which identified that the two partners shared similar interests in the reputation and financial sustainability of the partnership (See p.110). Given the demands and competitions in the market, the two partners aimed to develop a strong brand for this partnership institute. Hence, the two partners utilised the strengths of each side and hoped to develop first-class programmes with unique Chinese characteristics. The data show that the important influences of the market in this study which is acknowledged by Clark (1983).

Next, the two partners had to gain formal permissions from the Chinese government to set up the partnership given that the Chinese government has set up requirements and procedures for approving and accrediting new partnership programmes. The government’s influences were primarily shown in these aspects: first, it encouraged the Chinese parent university to collaborate with a well-recognised Western higher education institution; 2) it encouraged the two partners to set up the programmes that meet the demands of the socio-economic development of the Chinese nation; 3) it also encouraged the Chinese partner to introduce a sufficient amount of education resources and expertise from the foreign partner institution. Moreover, the government has put restrictions on student enrollment numbers and tuition fee standards, which had made it very challenging for the two partners to achieve quality while sustaining the partnership financially at the same time. The findings of this study show that the government was an important influence for this partnership institute, which aligns with Clark’s (1983) model in relation to the state’s political coordination.
Third, the Chinese parent university and the UK home institution were critical stakeholders for this partnership. Without their initiatives and engagement, the establishment of this joint second-tier partnership college would not have been possible. The data shows that the two partner institutions showed strong interests in developing this partnership. As for their motives, the Chinese parent university wanted to increase their reputation and improve their educational strength by partnering with the UK university; and the UK university was interested in attracting more students into their home programmes as well as developing its internationalisation strategy. This sense of collaboration, mutual trust, and respect was evident between the two parties (See p.125), which has contributed to the subsequent successful establishment of the programmes. This finding echoes with Hefferan and Poole (2005) who suggested that the building of mutual trust, effective communication, and sense of commitment between transnational partners are critical to creating successful establishment and development of international education partnerships. In this case, during the pre-delivery phase, the Chinese parent university’s major role was to provide substantial funding for setting the programmes up. There is little indication that the Chinese parent university had specific requirements on how the programmes should be developed. In contrast, the study shows that the UK home university paid significant attention to quality assurance issues of their overseas programmes. They strictly stuck to their university’s institutional quality assurance regulations and went through relevant procedures when approving the proposed transnational programmes. The programme directors, QA officers, and teaching academics who were involved in this project worked together and discussed various practicality issues relating to administration, academic teaching, and finance. The UK staff members focused on controlling the teaching materials and student examination assessment standards during this stage. The findings have identified the important roles of the UK home university and the Chinese parent university, which, however, were not included in Clark’s (1983) model.
When the programmes entered into the delivery phase, issues regarding the application of the programmes, programme design, student entry requirements, and the arrangement of teachers were starting to settle down. It appears that the focus of quality assurance in this stage was shifting from meeting the government’s and the UK home university’s policy regulations to improving the quality of student learning and teaching. During this stage, the study shows that the micro-level stakeholders, i.e., the UK and Chinese staff members and local students and parents were engaged in quality assurance activities actively. As for the role of the government, the Chinese MoE would send quality inspectors for quality evaluation occasionally and the local managers were requested to submit annual quality reports to the government for quality monitoring purposes.

From the perspective of the UK home university, the UK institutional academic managers were members of the joint governance board of the partnership institute and were engaged in the discussions of the issues with the Chinese partner via monthly video meetings. It was the departmental and programme level stakeholders, namely, the programme directors, teacher trainers and teaching academics that took a more active part in delivering the quality of these partnership programmes. Programme directors and the UK fly-in and fly-out teachers came to teach for a short period in a semester, and according to their responses, one of their major intentions was to enhance the local students’ readiness for the UK studies. While the UK teachers were in China, apart from undertaking some teaching, they also served as a mentor checking student exam papers to make sure the assessment standards were consistent and observed local teachers’ teaching in the classroom with a sense of equality.

In addition, experienced UK teacher trainers were sent to provide mentoring and informal professional training to the local teachers. According to the teacher trainers, these training
workshops were aimed to enhance the local teachers’ teaching capacity and bridge the gaps in their knowledge in teaching methodologies. The responses of the teacher trainers and the local teachers suggested that these training sessions had achieved positive outcomes, for example, it helped the local teachers to reflect on their teaching methods. However, the language teacher trainers indicated that on-going professional development was needed to further support the teachers. More demands for providing training to the subject teachers, not only the local Chinese but also the UK fly-in and fly-out teachers were identified by the teacher trainers who stressed the challenges of teaching in transnational contexts in the language of English. This viewpoint is in line with Hudson and Morris (2003) who suggested that academics who teach in transnational programmes need to have a number of skills and qualities, competencies and attitudes, including having language other than English, sensitivity to hidden cultural factors which may influence their teaching, using examples from a range of cultures and modifying assessment methods. The findings have demonstrated how the faculty members of the UK home university were engaged in quality assurance development. This is in line with ‘academic oligarchy’ according to Clark’ (1983) model.

Due to the ownership of this partnership college, it was the Chinese partners who were taking the major responsibility for quality assurance during this phase. Indeed, the study shows that the local academic managers and teachers made concerted efforts to improve the quality of student learning and teaching. They came up with various measures, such as organising informal student and parent meetings to collect their opinions, asking the students to fill in the evaluation forms, and organising weekly meetings amongst the teachers to discuss the academic issues. There was a sense that the local teachers were given freedom and trust to decide on how to deliver quality even though not all the student and parent suggestions were taken on board. The findings have shown how the local staff members, students, and parents were engaged in quality assurance activities in the
partnership institute. Linking to Clark’s (1983) model, the influence of the local staff members aligns with ‘academic oligarchy’, and the influences of the students and parents are in line with the ‘market’. Considering that the individuals (faculty members, students and parents) were based on the two partner institutions, to conceptualise the mechanism of stakeholder interaction in quality assurance in this study more clearly, the term of ‘UK home institution’ is used to include the individual level influences of the UK faculty members; similarly, the term of ‘partnership institute’ is adopted to indicate the influence of the local staff, students and parents. As a result, the term of ‘academic oligarchy’ will not be shown in the new developed model in this study.

To sum up, at the macro level, the partnership institute was subject to the Chinese government’s national quality regulatory regimes in relation to accreditation and quality evaluation and monitoring in the pre-delivery phase and delivery phase, respectively (See Section 6.2.1 and 6.3.3); the influences of the market was motivating the two partners to develop a high reputation and achieve financial success throughout the development of the partnership in light of the competition among their peers; at the meso level, the influences of the UK home university refer to the institutional quality assurance regulatory regimes concerning transnational programmes (see Section 6.2.1 and 6.3.1); and the influences of the Chinese parent university were linked to the parent university’s financial support and relevant institutional quality assurance regimes such as evaluation on teachers (See Section 6.2.3 and 6.3.4). The micro level stakeholders refer to the individuals who consist of the faculty members from the UK home institution (e.g., senior managers, programme directors, teacher trainers and teaching academics) and the local staff members, students and parents associated with the partnership institute.

Based on the analysis above, a new model of how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in this partnership institute is presented below (Figure 7-1). This
model shows that there were five key stakeholders from the macro, meso, and micro levels exerting influences on quality assurance approaches of this partnership institute, namely, the government, the market, the UK home university, the Chinese parent university, and the partnership institute. It is important to remember that the process of quality assurance of this case study partnership was not static but developmental, and that the roles of these key stakeholders and the level of their influences were changing as the partnership matured.

Figure 7-1 The Mechanism of Stakeholder Engagement in Quality Assurance in this Partnership Institute

Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed the notion of communities of practice to describe groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise. Wenger’s (1998) conceptualised that there are three interrelated dimensions of
communities of practices: 1) joint enterprise (domain) through which team members demonstrate commitment and passion to accomplish a specified task; 2) mutual engagement (community) through which team members share information and interact with each other; 3) shared repertoire (practice) through which resources are developed jointly. In Keay, May & O’Mahony’s (2014) study, they identified that there were existing practices which demonstrate the development of communities of practice between the staff members on and offshore, between staff and students, and as well as students. They suggested that communities of practice are beneficial to the improvement of quality of learning and teaching and building effective partnerships in transnational contexts. Hence, higher education institution partners need to pay crucial attention to the process of collaboration in which partners interact and engage collaboratively over time to achieve the best outcomes for the students (Keay, May & O’Mahony, 2014).

The findings of this study have demonstrated the development of communities of practice between the on and offshore staff members, between the local staff and students, as well as between the local staff and the parents alongside the development of this partnership. The oval linking the three of the stakeholders, i.e., the UK home university, the Chinese parent university, and the partnership institute in Figure 7-1 refer to where communities of practice were taking place. The two partners shared common goals, focusing on developing a successful partnership institute jointly. Further, the staff members in the UK and the Chinese partner institutions were actively engaged in developing this partnership during the preparation of the partnership and the delivery of quality of learning and teaching. As the partnership evolved, the two partners developed shared resources and practices to address various issues which arose. In particular, in this study, the engagement of the two partners in developing quality assurance have demonstrated the practices of creating a ‘new shared space’ for quality during the process of collaboration. This was especially evident in the early stage when the two partners came up with context-sensitive measures.
to develop quality when they were faced with the contradictions of quality and maintaining financial interests. For example, compromises and reconciliations were made in the areas of curriculum design, teacher arrangement, and student entry requirements. It is important to point out that the creation of the ‘new shared space’ for quality requires a strong sense of commitment, mutual trust, and effective communication between the two parties. This study argues that future partners should be open-minded and be prepared to create a ‘new shared space’ for quality during transnational collaboration when there is any disagreement or contradiction.

In addition, it is necessary to emphasise the important role of the ‘boundary spanners’ (e.g. the UK partnership director and Chinese deputy dean of international collaboration) on both sides in facilitating the communication and creating that ‘new shared space’ for quality. The point is supported by Bordogna (2019) which argues that ‘boundary spanning is a useful tool, enabling individuals to interpret, transmit and filter knowledge, facilitate resource transmission and represent their organisations, building cohesion and commitment between stakeholders’ in the context of transnational partnership (p.217). Hence, senior managers at higher education institutions should consider boundary spanning as a tool with which to manage and evolve their transnational education partnerships.

Waterval et al. (2014) suggested that home university staff are not familiar with, or confident or experienced in working with students and colleagues in transnational programmes. It appears that this problem also existed in this study as the responses of the teachers of both parties suggested that the UK teachers indicated that they were not very clear about how the local teachers and students were progressing while they were based in the UK (see p.142). Hence, this study calls for more attention to be paid to creating a more effective communication platform between the teachers in order to better support the local
teachers and students. Equally, on the Chinese side, the interviews with the local foreign teachers, especially those who were newly-employed suggest that they were not very familiar with or confident about the specific soci-cultural, legal and economic contexts of the partnership institute they were working for, or very clear about the learning habits of the Chinese students. This finding is supported by Gribble and Ziguras (2003) who proposed that transnational lecturers need to develop a good intercultural awareness, knowing the contexts of their institution and the circumstances of their students. Moreover, as many local foreign teachers had to go through a process of adjustment into the working environment and lifestyles of the country, higher education senior managers should be aware of the foreign teachers’ needs and provide some induction or orientation programmes to support these foreign teachers effectively (Dunn and Wallace, 2006).

7.3 Contribution of the Study

In light of the findings and discussion presented, this study can make the following theoretical and practical contributions to developing quality in a Sino-UK transnational partnership:

7.3.1 Theoretical Contribution

The study has contributed to the body of knowledge in the literature (e.g., Pyvis, 2011; Pyvis, 2013; Dunn and Wallace, 2006; Zhuang and Tang, 2012) regarding the issue of quality assurance in transnational higher education partnerships, using the case of a Sino-UK second-tier college as an example. By reviewing the UK and Chinese stakeholders’ perspectives of quality and quality assurance, the study highlights the differences in the priorities, concerns, and interests of different stakeholders within the institution and across the partnership. It shows that in this case study partnership, the UK and Chinese
stakeholders’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance were influenced by their specific roles and the national or institutional quality assurance regulatory contexts. The analysis of policy documents has further confirmed this. In addition, it also highlights the importance of maintaining financial sustainability to quality in transnational partnerships.

The study set out to use Clark’s (1983) triangle of coordination theory as the analytical framework to explore the influences of the key stakeholders. The findings of this study suggest that the mechanism of quality assurance in a transnational partnership setting is more complicated than a coordination of triangle, rather it is a multi-dimensional coordination of stakeholders consisting of: the Chinese government and the market at the macro-level, the UK home university and Chinese parent university leadership at the meso-level; and the flying faculty, local staff members, students and parents at the micro level. These forces interacted with each other simultaneously but from multiple dimensions. Moreover, their roles in influencing the quality assurance mechanism as well as the level of these influences changed in different phases depending on the development conditions of the partnership. Significantly, this study has developed Clark’s (1983) model, extending the triangular coordination framework into a multiple-dimension of coordination to conceptualise the interrelations and interactions between the key stakeholders in transnational higher education partnerships. It argues that crucial attention needs to be paid to the micro-level quality assurance process, that is, the way in which the staff members, students, and parents were engaged in improving the quality of learning and teaching. In particular, the study proposes the notion of creating a ‘new shared space for quality’ during the process of the two partners’ interactions and ongoing reciprocal transactions to develop context-sensitive quality measures to assure quality.
7.3.2 Practical Contribution

This study investigated how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in a Sino-UK transnational partnership. An exploration of the quality assurance mechanisms in this case study partnership institute is meaningful because it helps to understand the policy requirements of the government and partner institutions on quality assurance, the roles of the key stakeholders in influencing quality assurance approaches, and the specific issues that education partners need to pay attention to in different phases of the partnership. For example, this study brings our attention to the key issues relating to quality, including teacher professional development, student learning demands, and partner relationship management in transnational higher education. The findings of this study can provide useful insights into quality assurance development for future partners and help to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of quality assurance practices.

The case in this study is an exemplary practice of communities of practices. There were many good practices that future partnership institutions could learn from. In particular, the study highlights the potential for developing communities of practices among the local staff members, flying faculty, and students and parents in assuring quality, and the importance of having effective communication, mutual trust, and willingness to make compromises to develop successful partnerships.

The findings have also pointed out the challenges of the two partners during the process of quality assurance development and the areas that need to be improved in the future. For example, the Chinese government need to design a new regulatory quality assurance regime to better support the development of new types of transnational partnerships; there is a need to provide on-going professional development to the teaching academics; and there is a need to provide induction and orientation programmes for the local foreign
teachers. For the higher education managers of this case study, they could benefit from these findings and take relevant actions in the future to improve the quality and the quality assurance mechanisms in transnational partnerships.

7.4 Reflections on the Research Process and Future Research

7.4.1 Reflections on the Research Process

Sponsored by the China Scholarship Council, I started my PhD journey in October 2014. Over the past 4 years studying in Glasgow, I have achieved tremendous self-transformation through my education experience. I learned how to undertake a critical review of literature and how to think critically and deeply. As a doctoral student, quality in my education programme means helping me to grow into an independent thinker, a confident researcher, and a positive person who does not give up in face of challenges in life.

When I first started my PhD, I knew I was always interested in transnational partnerships. Originally, I was focused on researching international branch campuses because they often claim to provide the same education quality as the host country. I was interested in how the key stakeholders’ influence quality assurance approaches in an international branch campus to achieve this mission. However, during the second year of my PhD, while I was preparing for my data collection, I encountered practical challenges in getting permission from international branch campuses in China because the ‘gatekeepers’ of these institutions were concerned about their reputation being affected. As a result, I had to shift my focus from the international branch campus into second-tier Sino-foreign colleges to broaden my choices for research. This experience told me that quality assurance in
transnational partnership is a sensitive yet such important topic which needs more exploration and attention.

As a Chinese student studying in the UK, I was able to understand both higher education systems well. This has provided me with an advantage when researching Sino-UK transnational partnership. Another advantage is that I am proficient in both languages, i.e. English and Chinese. During the data collection, I encouraged the participants to speak the language that they felt more comfortable with, which helped me to collect rich data from them.

Every piece of research has its limitations, this study included. As a single case study, there is obviously a limitation to the generality of the findings. The findings of this study can provide an insight into quality development in similar institutions. However, it is important to remember that each partnership has its own unique characteristics and aspects of partner responsibility vary from institution to institution regarding quality assurance issues such as student support, marketing, financial administration, academic teaching, academic assessment and curriculum (Davis, Olsen, Bohm, 2000). Thus, the study has limitations in the generability of the findings. In addition, there were also limitations in the data collected from the students in the focus groups. Students were very shy to express their opinions during the discussions and their level of English abilities in expressing themselves were not very high. Consequently, the data generated from the focus group was not very rich or helpful for understanding the students’ perceptions of quality and quality assurance. However, student voice was not the focus of this study, and it is used for the sake of helping to understand the mechanisms of quality assurance in the partnership institute (Section 6.3.4), and the data collected from the students is primarily presented in Chapter 6, which helps to understand how the students were engaged in the institute’s quality assurance activities.
7.4.2 Future Research

Transnational partnerships are a fascinating emerging area which desperately requires more research and attention. Some research ideas have been generated from this study which require attention from scholars. For example, this study focuses on the perspectives of higher education partners in quality assurance development. It would be interesting to look at the students’ perspective in these types of transnational partnerships. For example, what are the expectations and learning needs of the Chinese local students? What challenges do they have during their process of studying in these transnational programmes, specifically in terms of adapting to the transnational learning environments? How do they view their learning experiences and their institutions?

In addition, another key area which deserves more research attention is to look at the professional development of the teaching academics in transnational programmes. Future studies could investigate the teaching academics’ experiences in attending the professional development sessions to find out their learning demands and in what ways these professional development training opportunities have impacted their teaching. This would be beneficial to better enhance the preparedness of the teaching academics in transnational partnerships.

By the time the data collection was conducted, the partnership institute was transitioning to the enhanced phase. Hence, there is limited information about how quality assurance will be implemented during the new enhanced phase. There is a research potential to do a follow-up study to investigate quality assurance situations in the new phase, for example, what are the main approaches that the two partners use to assure quality? What would be the interrelationship among the key stakeholders? What are the opportunities and challenges in implementing quality assurance by then?
7.5 Chapter Summary

This study has explored how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance approaches in a Sino-UK transnational partnership institute. The study shows that quality assurance in transnational partnership is very complex and that five key stakeholders from multiple dimensions, including the Chinese government, the market, the foreign home university and the Chinese parent university, and the local partnership were exerting influences in quality assurance in this case study partnership. As the partnership evolves, how the key stakeholders influence quality assurance varied and the level of their influences also changed. In particular, more attention needs to be paid to the micro-level quality assurance practices within the partnership institute to focus on improving the quality of learning and teaching. When faced with challenges or contradictions, it is important to work collaboratively towards creating a ‘new shared space’ for quality on the basis of strong sense of commitment, mutual trust, and respect to seek contextually appropriate solutions. Future partners should also consider developing communities of practice in which the staff members on and offshore engage as a tool to improve the quality of learning and teaching.
Reference


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Appendices

Appendix 1- Research Permit to the Case Study Partnership Institute

23 January 2017

Dear Hui Lu,

I am pleased to inform you that my colleagues and I will be happy to assist you with your fieldwork on “Quality assurance in transnational higher education: a case study of two Sino-UK partnership institutions” and my understanding is that my colleagues at [University Name] will be happy to help.

We welcome your visit to [City Name] this year and look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely,
Appendix 2- Ethical Approval from the University of Glasgow

Administrative & Academic Review Feedback

Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

Staff Research Ethics Application ☐ Postgraduate Student Research Ethics Application ☒

Application Details

Application Number: 400160023
Applicant’s Name: Hui Lu
Project Title: Quality assurance in transnational education: a case study of a Sino-UK branch campus in China
Application Status: Lead Review Complete- No changes required

Date of Administrative/Academic Review: 30/11/2016

NB: Only if the applicant has been given approval can they proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval.

Recommendations (where changes are required)
Where changes are required all applicants must respond in the relevant boxes to the recommendations of the Committee (on the following page) and upload this as the Resubmission Document through the system to explain the changes you have made to the application.

All resubmitted application documents should then be uploaded.

If your application is rejected a new application must be submitted via the online system. Where recommendations are provided, they should be responded to and this document uploaded as part of the new application. A new reference number will be generated.

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Please retain this notification for future reference. If you have any enquiries, please email socsci-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk.

University of Glasgow
College of Social Sciences
Florentine House, 53 Hillhead Street. Glasgow G12 8QF
The University of Glasgow, charity number SC004401

E-mail: socsci-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk
Appendix 3- Plain Language Statement

Plain Language Statement

Study title and researcher details

University of Glasgow, School of Education

Project Title: Quality Assurance in Transnational Education: a Case Study of a Sino-UK Branch Campus in China

Researcher: Hui Lu
Supervisors: Professor Kay Livingston and Professor Barbara Kehm
Full-Time Research PhD

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to join the study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to contact the researcher if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you very much for taking the time to read this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to research how quality assurance approaches are influenced by stakeholders of quality assurance in transnational education collaboration between China and the UK through the case study at [University of XXX]. The research will be used for Hui Lu’s PhD, and the study will be completed by 31/03/2018.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are a staff member at [University of XXX], and therefore you are an appropriate person to speak at this institution. Your knowledge in relation to quality assurance policies and arrangements through your day-to-day work is invaluable and will greatly facilitate this study.

Do I have to take part?
It is completely up to you whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide to take part, but then at any stage would like to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

The study will be in the format of an in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interview.

The researcher will invite you to a face-to-face interview, which will take **30-60 minutes**, to identify the key stakeholders of quality assurance, and to share your perceptions on the influences of quality assurance stakeholders on quality assurance processes. This will take place on campus at a time and place that is convenient for you. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded.

**Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

Yes. You will be identified by an ID number, as will your institution, and any information about you will have your name, address and institution removed so that you cannot be recognised from it. However, please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The anonymised data will be archived by the researcher, Hui Lu, in her password-protected computer and will only be shared with her supervisors Professor Kay Livingston and Professor Barbara Kehm, and the external PhD examiner. The research will be published as a PhD thesis, journal articles, book chapters and conference presentations.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

The researcher and her PhD supervisors have reviewed this study as have the University of Glasgow’s College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

**Contact for Further Information**

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the researcher Hui Lu by email at h.lu.1@research.gla.ac.uk. You can also contact her supervisors, Professor Kay Livingston at Kay.Livingston@glasgow.ac.uk or Professor Barbara Kehm at Barbara.Kehm@glasgow.ac.uk, or the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer Dr. Muir Houston at Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk.
Appendix 4- Consent Form

Consent Form

To be read to the participants and their consent to be orally recorded.

Title of Project: Quality Assurance in Transnational Education: a case study of a Sino-UK branch campus in China

Name of Researcher: Hui Lu

Please agree or disagree orally by saying ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ when the question is ready to you.

1. Can you confirm that you have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions? ☐

2. Do you understand that your participation is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason? ☐

3. Can you confirm that you understand that you are giving consent to complete the online questionnaire and the interview, which will be audiotaped? ☐

4. Do you agree to take part in the above study? ☐

5. Can you confirm that you understand that you, and your faculty, will always be to be referred to by pseudonym in any publications arising from the research? ☐
If you agree, please say your full name and the date before the interview begins.

Name of Participant ............................................

Date ..................................................
Appendix 5- Interview Questions with Chinese/UK Academic Managers

Profile

1. Can you tell you your job roles at the partnership institution?
2. How long have you been working on this role?
3. Before you took the role at the Academy, had you worked in other Sino-UK partnership institution before or were you familiar with the area of Sino-UK transnational education?
4. What were the main motivations of establishing this joint institution?

Conception of quality and quality assurance

1. What type of China-UK partnership institution does your institution aim to become?
2. Quality assurance is a western concept. Are you new to this concept? Can you tell me why partnership institutions in China nowadays are also paying attention to quality assurance?
3. Do you think there are any differences between the Chinese understanding of quality assurance and the Western?

Quality assurance mechanisms at the joint academy

1. What strategies does your institution use for assuring quality (who involved; how organized)?
2. At the initial stage of collaboration, did you have any discussion and negotiations with your partner in how to do quality assurance? Can you tell me the story of it? How did you reach the agreement?
3. Are there any changes in this mechanism from the start of the programme until now? If yes, what are the changes?
4. What role do your partner and your faculty have during the process?
5. Are there any requirements that imposed by the foreign partner on quality assurance?
6. How are students engaged in quality assurance?
7. Are there any opportunities for staff to voice their opinions on quality issues?
8. Are there any approaches to quality assurance with Chinese characteristics? If yes, what are they? Why that?
9. What influences does the Chinese government exert on quality assurance activities?
10. Who else are key stakeholders that are engaged in quality assurance activities?
11. What are the strategic plans of quality assurance for the new two programmes just opened last year?

Influential factors

1. What achievements has your institution made since the opening of the programme?
2. Do you think the achieving of progress has something to do with the strategies of quality assurance?
3. Do you think it is appropriate for China-UK partnership institution to copy a Western way of quality assurance?
4. If yes, why? If No, why not?
5. What are the crucial factors to the success of China-UK higher education collaboration?
Appendix 6- Interview Questions with Chinese/UK Teaching Academics

Profiles

1. Can you tell you your job roles at the partnership institution?
2. How long have you been working on this role?
3. Apart from this Academy, have you been worked in any other partnership institutions before?
4. How is your employment arrangement?

Conceptions of quality and quality assurance

1. As a teacher, what is your understanding of quality in higher education?
2. What qualities should quality in higher education have?
3. Is the concept of quality assurance new to you? And how do you understand quality assurance?
4. Why do you think there is a need for quality assurance?

Quality assurance mechanisms at the joint academy

1. Can you tell me about your teaching arrangement at the partnership institution (mode of delivery, where and how)?
2. Can you tell me about your experiences in any quality assurance activities?
3. What support does your institution or the UK partner has provided you to help you to improve teaching?
4. Are there any requirements or policies in relation to quality assurance from your institution affecting your teaching?
5. Are there any requirements given by the UK partner for quality assurance?
6. How is your teaching being monitored or reviewed at the Joint Academy?
7. Do you often discuss with your colleagues at your faculty and your UK colleagues about quality assurance in your work? Can you give me an example of it?
8. How do you view the current quality assurance arrangements at your faculty?
Influential factors

1. How do you find your experience of quality assurance activities at your faculty?
2. What challenges do you encounter in the course of quality assurance activities during your work?
3. What are the crucial factors to the success of quality assurance in the context of transnational higher education?
4. What do you think the institution could do better for improving quality assurance?
Appendix 7  Focus Group Discussion with Local Students

Profile

1. Can you tell me your name, your hometown, your major, which year you are in, and your role in the student Union please?
2. What made you choose to study at this institution?
3. How do you find your studying experience so far?
4. What is your plan after finish your study here?

Conceptions of quality and quality assurance

1. What do you expect from your institution as a student for your education?
2. How do you think of your learning environment at this institution?
3. Have you heard about quality assurance?

Quality assurance mechanisms at the academy

1. Since you started your course here, what support have you received from your school?
2. Do you consider you are the customer of education buying commodities from your institution?
3. What would you do if you are not satisfied with any issues?
4. What would you do if you have difficulties in your studies? Who will you turn to?
5. Have you been involved in any quality assurance activities at your school?
6. Do you find the current teaching arrangements can satisfy your learning needs?
7. Do you feel your foreign staff have enough communication and time for you when you have any questions to ask?
8. How do you think of the current education mode at your faculty?
9. Can you relate your role in the student union with share with us your experiences in quality assurance activities?
10. What do you think your institution cares the most about student learning?
11. Have you ever evaluated teachers’ performance during the past two years?

**Influential factors**

1. What you like the most at your faculty?
2. What do you think your institution could do better to improve your education experience?
3. How do you think your foreign teachers and Chinese teachers could collaborate to improve your education experience?
Appendix 8- An Example of the Interview Transcript: Interview with the UK Partnership Director (PD)

Me: Can you briefly describe your role and responsibility in this programme?

PD: I play a unique role in this programme, just like the bridge between the two sides to help smoothen the communication and deepen the understanding. I think we not only need to understand the situations here but also the situations in China in order to develop a good cooperation. This kind of understanding should not be superficial but requires some work experience.

Me: Thank you. That’s a good point. Actually my research is to understand the differences of the two parties’ positioning during the process of Sino-British cooperation. You know how the two different systems collaborate and try to find a common ground to deliver quality.

ME: I think it is important to interview you because you are Chinese citizen which means that you are familiar with China’s education. Meanwhile, you are working in the University of [name of the UK home institution] and represents [name of the UK home institution] in some sense. By interviewing you, I hope to understand the detailed process of negotiation and what key factors that have affected the negotiations.

PD: There must be complexities in the Sino-foreign cooperation because the two sides will have different backgrounds, different systems thus in the process of cooperation, especially in the early stage there must require good communication and negotiation. This involves the understanding of what the cooperation programmes mean to the two parties. As for this programme, our two partners are very active and enthusiastic. [Name of the Chinese parent institution] is very happy to collaborate with [name of the UK home institution] University because the University of [Name of the UK home institution] has a good global reputation in the world which is beneficial for enhancing the education level in [name of the Chinese parent university]. As for the University of [name of the UK home institution], the [case study partnership institute] project is important as part of the internationalization strategy in light of its great potential. The two parties both want the project and want it a big success. However, the road to success requires mutual effort of the two parties. In terms of communication, we have mutual visits to each other. Our staff from the University of [UK home institution] have been to [the Chinese parent university] many times. In the initial stage, we went there to sign the agreement. Since the MOE’s approval to the actual operation, myself even has been there for three times accompanying the vice-president of
Foreign international relations, project manager and the chief quality assurance strategy officer to have face-to-face communication. We also have regular skype calls or email exchanges to communicate. Sometimes the informal approach through me is also helpful because some issues including the Chinese policies need nuanced understanding and explanation. We really need further communication in order to reach a good agreement.

Me: right! What were the major issues you were discussing on in the early stage?

PD: Since my involvement, the [partnership institute] has been in operation since 2015. The early stage discussions were about finance and investment of both parties. You know how much we contribute to the financial investment in order to build things up and whether the [partnership institute] can afford this. Our foreign partner was very concerned about the reputation of the university [name of the Chinese parent university], how to ensure quality, etc., which were the starting point of the collaboration in phase one. The early stage required a developmental process. At a certain stage, our investment will be higher than the receiving. We had a lot of investment to subsidize it. For example, how much we charge for tuition fees, and how to spend the money. Other issues are resources, human labour, and facilities which were the most discussed.

Me: What kind of program do the Chinese and the UK partners want it to be?

PD: We want to create first-class program which blends the strength of the both and develop our own characteristics. The University of [UK home institution] attached great importance to quality assurance. For example, the programmes we are offering are all strong subjects of the two universities. For example, the fact that students come to study in [name of the UK home institution] in the last year might be important or unimportant for some subjects. However, in the long-term, it is important to promote internationalization for the two partners. We would like to make the [partnership institute] very successful and unique, one of the best among China’s domestic cooperative institutions.

Me: What input did the University of [UK home institution] provide?

PD: First of all, the introduction of the course. According to the one-third principle of the MOE, Sino-foreign partnership institutions must introduce at least one-third foreign course materials. At the moment, we are running the 3+1 programme in the programme of Chemistry and Economics. We are hoping the [partnership institute] is turning into 4+0 this September. So the University of [UK home institution] provides curriculum, we call it phase two, enhanced phase two. So for the original 3+1 model, we do not have responsibility for it. Currently we are providing capacity building which is a very important approach to assure quality and lay a good foundation for the latter stage. Our colleagues in [UK home university] provide training for the newly recruited
English language teachers (some are local and some are native English speakers). In addition, we also care about teachers’ continuous professional development and give teachers opportunities to get accredited status. One of the requirements is to attend training by Centre for Quality Support and Development (CQSD). Another thing is the management and governance structure in the governance committee. I am one of the committee members among the seven. There are three representatives from the University of [UK home institution] and four from [THE Chinese parent university]. Me, Dean of Teaching and Learning, and the Vice-president for Foreign International Relations. The two parties are still in the process of ongoing negotiation on how much modules do we open, how many new courses should we provide this year and next year, and the application to the MOE and so on.

Me: what are the procedures has the [partnership institute] gone through from the programme approval to programme running?

PD: For the domestic side, it has to go through the procedures of [name of the Chinese parent university] for application approval. The University of [UK home institution] provided materials, course specifications, course descriptions to support the application of [name of the Chinese parent university]. For the foreign side we also had gone through application process through various departments. Recently, we are doing academic scrutiny to scrutinize the education programmes provided in the [partnership institute] such as the foundation year courses and subject courses. Fortunately, I was involved in the scrutiny process for the foundation year programme. They asked them many questions including issues around quality and operational risks, student experiences...whether the curriculum design is reasonable? What is the proof? Is it the template of university or...? And the Chinese domestic quality assurance mechanisms. In the end, they will provide us some recommendations and respond to the problems that identified.

Me: What are the reasons for these problems?

PD: Because it is a new creature. We are still stepping on the stone to cross the river in many aspects and do not have much experience to learn from. Of course we have peer meetings among similar institutions in this field, for instance, the China-Britain Business Council (CBBC) to exchange ideas. But I feel everybody is still a bit not sure what to do and in early exploration stage. Well, there are some successful experiences and the MOE encourages everyone to learn from them. However, you know every institution is different. The two education systems are very different as you can see that the Chinese universities are standardized and state-controlled, while the UK universities are relatively independent and enjoys much autonomy. There must be many things to discuss when you put them together.
Me: Have you had any contact with the Chinese government?

PD: At present no, our domestic partners are dealing with the government. I think at the moment it largely relies on the domestic partner’s advice in regard to how to play the advantages into full strength within the Chinese-foreign cooperation, you know how to go through the application procedures, and how to interpret the Chinese policies. However, in the early application stage, the leadership from both [UK home institution] and the [Chinese parent institution] have been to the interviews of the MOE and were interviewed separately. Apart from these, we provided any materials upon request to support [Chinese parent university]’s application.

Me: How has the work focus shifted since the program application?

PD: Now we are mainly considering about the actual operation of the programmes. For example, the course design is relatively easy because the [partnership institute] basically is importing curriculum the University of [UK home institution]. What is more complex is the financial issues. For example, how to clarify the legal status of the [name of the partnership institute]. As for the [partnership institute], it is a second-tier college attached to a Chinese public university and does not have independent legal status, which is different from the University of Nottingham Ningbo and Xi’an Jiaotong Liverpool University. The advantage of not having legal status lies in its relatively less risky and simple procedures to get it started compared to international branch campuses. However, the downside of it is the inadequacies of the operational flexibility in terms of the charges. International branch campus can charge more fees, while the second-tier colleges are faced with strict standards due to the restriction of its legal status. The fundamental principle is it is a good thing...The two parties have good intention to do it. But we have to take responsibilities for the profits and costs. The Chinese policies do not allow making profits. However, we cannot lose money either. Now we hope to recover the costs but still the fees are not meeting the original expectations of both parties. You know, fees in second-tier colleges are quite low in [X] Province and this is a potential problem and has impact on the future development of the [case study partnership institute]. We have got six programme approved by the MOE, but because of the adjustment of the [partnership institute], we only have four in operation at the moment.

Me: what are the staffing arrangement in the [partnership institute] in order to ensure teaching quality?

PD: In terms of the staffing arrangement, for the 3+1 model programmes, we send our foreign staff from the UK occasionally and we have recruited international teachers. As far as I know, they have recruited one teacher each in Chemistry, Economic and International Business and two
English language teachers. Me myself have participated in the recruitment process. These teachers are employed jointly together by us. Internally, the [partnership institute] has also recruited another foreign teacher. Apart from these, they also have their own local teachers. So we mainly rely on the two approaches, i.e. flying faculties and international recruitment. Teachers that were recruited during the international recruitment were confirmed by the University of [UK home institution] and was awarded with university teacher qualification of [UK home institution].

This is an important initiative for the University of [UK home institution] to ensure quality.

Although the recruitment process is a joint recruitment, strictly speaking in the legal sense, it is recruited by the [Chinese parent university] because it does not have independent legal status. However, the interviewers were comprised with the leaders from the Chinese and British partners, English language teachers and subject teachers from [UK home institution]. The [UK home institution] people provided advice on who to employ and it was undertaken according to the [UK home institution] procedures, but the final decision is up to the [Chinese parent university] people. In terms of the interview questions and interview forms, they have also taken the [Chinese parent university] model into account. This is also a contribution to Chinese education. You know the most important thing for Chinese-foreign cooperation in running is to learn from advanced education experiences and practices which include teacher recruitment methods and quality assurance measure.

Me: Currently, what are the main quality assurance measures that the [partnership institute] is using for ensuring quality?

PD: There are several ways. First, the University of [UK home institution] needs to check on the curriculum design. Once we are in phase 4+0 model, they will completely transplant [UK home institution]’s curriculum. Second, we also check on the recruitment of staff and teachers, making sure that the teachers recruited are qualified, especially during the process of the global recruitment. There were many applicants applying for this job at that time. Although we were desperate for teachers, we would rather wait than recruit unqualified teachers if they are not meeting our standards. For the teachers recruited locally, we also keep an eye on their teaching quality. For example, we would observe their teaching and get to know their qualifications. These are all measures for ensuring the quality of teachers. In addition to these, we provided teachers with professional development training, which is a highlight of our model. We send our experienced teacher trainers there to give the local teachers professional support on the teaching pedagogy and understanding the policies and procedures of quality assurance, with the aim to help them enhance themselves and keep them stay from a long-term perspective. Third, in terms of the university governance, we have a body of very experienced colleagues who are taking care
of the management. [Name of the UK Dean of Teaching and Learning] is responsible for teaching and learning whose strength is quality assurance in curriculum design. He is very serious in his work. In our project board, we also have colleagues from CQSD who are specialized in quality assurance. Other measures are still in development and negotiation, for example, we are focusing on how to improve student experiences. We have partnership director in ISLI, which is me, responsible for coordinating with relevant parties on how to make sure students have quality education experiences.

Me: Have you encountered any cultural differences during your work with the [partnership institute] in quality assurance activities? If yes, what are they?

PD: Yes, but cultural differences are actually very subtle. Culture is not just an abstract concept. For example, there is no special requirements of students’ English level in the current student admission system even though we know students recruited will be taught in English. In fact, the entry requirements are still the same as other departments in the [Chinese parent university] from the Gaokao system. We want them to clarify the threshold of English level several times because we have requirements for students’ IELTS progression, i.e. students have to pass IELTS 6.5 after the first foundation study. Some students’ English grades are lower compared to other subjects. Although we did suggested setting entry requirement on English, but... So this is a difference in the education system. At present, we have to stick to how the [Chinese parent university] does. The [Chinese parent university] believes it is more important to recruit students first and train them hard afterwards, while Reading wants to know their level right in the beginning of the enrolment. This is an idealized state of [UK home institution] but it is difficult to do this considering the current situation.

Other things are more subtle. We have one advantage that anything that is ambiguous or not clear, we will communicate. At this point, someone who speaks Chinese like me is particularly important to bridge the communication. My role sometimes is formal and sometimes informal in order to clarify the misunderstandings between the two sides. You know, it was not absolutely no problem in the early stage communication. There was a wide gap between the tuition fees expected by the University of [UK home institution] and the final approved price. The [UK home institution] wanted to communicate timely, but the Chinese side sometimes were not so urgent to respond. So far, the communication has been smooth and timely. The two parties have a strong will to make it a success. It cannot be achieved without the joint efforts.
Me: What have you concluded based on your experience in developing quality assurance in the Academy so far?

PD: I think the key point is good communication and understanding between the key personnel in the two parties because without this, it is very challenging considering the substantial and complicated investments (finance, human labour and resources). The [Chinese parent university] mainly invested on the infrastructure and teaching facilities and [UK home institution] has invested much on human resources. You know, the two parties both have placed it as a priority in the university’s internationalization strategies. The senior leadership vice-presidents both have paid a lot of attention to the project. The core members of the [partnership institute] sometimes work without any cost of time and energy during weekends, evenings regardless of time differences.

Second, I think the composition of the staff is also very important. The [Chinese parent institution] has staff who had studied or even worked in the UK before. And our side also has people who have Chinese background, who is really a big advantage. I think this is really important. At critical moments, we need to inject enthusiasm into the cooperation.

Me: How do you think of the current quality assurance policies in China for Sino-UK partnership cooperation?

PD: I think because this is a new creature, China is still exploring in terms of Sino-foreign cooperation. I think the policies and regulations are also in early exploration stage. It seems that the interpretations on policy regulations is also not that clear. The MOE, local education institutions and some other relevant departments are also stepping on the stone to cross the river. I think peer experience exchange will be very important for us. We stick to The Regulation on Implementation of Sino - foreign Cooperation in Running Schools but China should have more practical policies on some detailed aspects, such as tuition fees standard, the number of student enrolment and so on. It is very difficult to cut it into one size for all institutions to implement because every institution is different.

Me: Thank you! That’s my questions with you today.
Appendix 9-An Example of the Interview Transcript in Chinese: Interview with the Chinese Faculty Dean

Q: 请问您是如何理解教育质量这一模糊概念的？

A: 我的理解是“教育质量”要培养的学生一定要符合当初设定的目标。就是要把学生培养成什么样的人。比如说，我们会把学生培养成不同类型的人，很多大学都会把培养目标设定为精英型的人才，成为国家级的科学技术人员，国家大学的教师或者说是大企业的骨干之类的，那么这一类培养目标。还有一类目标呢，当然也是分层分类，把学生培养成一个应用型的人才，比如说，很多中低层的管理人员，大学的技术人员，或者说事业单位的中下级管理者，这样的分类，叫做工匠型；还有一种，特别是中国这种当下的学生出国留学，成为国际化的人才，在国外就业。你就要把学生按照你的设想的目标采取一定的措施，把学生培养成达到这个目标的人，那么我认为就是教学质量。所以我们中国的教学质量的评估就是你的做法和你的成效是否达到当初设定的目标。中国教育部每五年一次本科教育的质量评估就是这个。那么这个就是说教育质量，因为这个是教育质量所以我们做的事情的时候就要考虑到因为我们要培养学生首先你的教学计划是否符合这个要求，所以现在很多大学里面分层分类别的教学计划，什么叫分层分类别的教学计划呢，就是不同的目标的人才。因为学校里面招到很多不同的人才，国外也会有领袖级人物的大企业和中高级人才，很多大学并不愿意把自己培养成一个很低级的职业技术目标，一般来说都是设置比较高的目标，那么你就要把人的培养措施跟上，比如说教学计划，师资队伍，实验实训，我们其他的一些教育，比如通识教育，素质教育。我们学院希望培养我们的学生像你一样的，部分学生能够成为国际知名大学的硕士博士。我们中外合作大学很多就是家长希望通过我们这个桥梁或者把他们当做一个助推器一样送到海外去，大部分的家长抱着这样的想法，几乎百分之八九十的家长都是这样想的，孩子们本身不一定有这样的想法。我们还要把一部分学生能够到中外合资的机构，或者外资企业，或者中国在外的企事业里就业。所以，对我们来说，首先就要有流利的英语，第二有国际化的视野，第三就是勤奋好学、爱岗敬业的态度，当然还要有一颗善良的心，还有善于沟通的能力。我们对学生的英语要求比较高，很多教学资源很多师资都是从海外引进，我们的课程也是从英国大学引进，就是要让学生有国际化的视野，等到他们对英国大学上学的时候并不陌生。同时呢，要求他们积极参与到社会活动中去，他们去volunteer，他们去社会实践。我们出资把英国大学的学生请过来跟他们进行沟通，就是要让他们有和外国人沟通的能力。我们采取了很多措施就是要确保教育质量。我们的考试卷英国大学都要来看。我们专门从第三方请了国家级教学名师来当督导。我们学院的师资是全球招聘的，无论是英语教师还是海外教师都是从全球招聘进来的，有华裔也有非华裔。我们上次招了 8 个中国教师，7 个西方教师，人才国际化。我认为教学质量就是要有国际一流的师资，严格的教学态度，较高的教学资源，符合高水平大学的教学资源，教师师资队伍的引进。我们还要从国外引进水平较高的教授来任职，我相信我们培养的学生一点也不比英国大学差。而且我们实际情况是，我们到了英国去了以后，获得一等学位的比例比他们高。我们的学生基础知识比较扎实，差就在外语上。我们的外语，一年的外语通过了以后，中国同学 100 个人雅思 7.5 就有 4 个，7.0 考上去的 11 个，还有二三十个一年就这样来了。他们进来的时候外语都很差的，但是现在的英语讲的就很好。
Q: 那么第二个问题: 教育质量保障这一概念又是如何理解的呢？

A：教育质量的保障呢，我们认为首先要有一个机构在监督着你，有一个行业在监视着你，还有一个大学在看着你，还有众多的家长在盯着你。我觉得有了这些，质量就能做好。当然首先，要自律。我们现在在创牌子，我就告诉我们的老师我们砸钱，[中方机构]非常不错，这几年给了我们几百万块钱，让我们砸墙创牌子，就是要创质量保障的牌子。就是我们培养的学生质量要好。

我们学院里面现在有三项大工作，第一项符合两个国家的法律法规，遵守教育法，遵守两所大学的规章制度；第二项就是要确保我们的质量要有保障；第三个就是要做招生宣传。我们要让大家知道我们学院不仅要做的好，我们的宣传工作做的也不错。要让大家知道有这个学院。其中最主要一条就是抓质量，不惜成本抓质量，不要怕花钱。其中我们要求中国教育部主动来我们这里评估，他们的评估过程就会对发现质量问题，第二个，我们主动要求加入英国的 QAA 质量保障体系中去，我们主动要求专业认证，其中最主要的就是质量的认证。我们还有一个行业对我们的质量的保障，我们要有一个部门，[中方机构]教学处专门的教育质量评价科，还有一个教学评估中心专门对我们的进行评价。他们会通过信息员啊，督导员。我们自己也专门请了督导，第三方学校对我们进行评估。同时，我们还有通过学生。我们本院进行的考试很难说明我们的质量，我们要英语要参加雅思考试，数学参加全校竞赛型的考试。比率都很高，主动参加，因为我们不知道我们的质量。我们学校已经有几十年的办学史，他们的数学学生好坏高低都有评价，他们都是用中文上的，我们是用英文上的，那么我们要参加他们的考试中去，最后判定我们的质量行不行。这种试卷我们还请英国大学来抽检我们的试卷，再加上我们教育部的评估，我们主动加入到评估当中去，他们也来看我们的试卷，同时也对我们的学生的质量进行比较好的保障。首先要有质量的意识，然后要有主动加入到质量保证体系里面去，我们是不同的质量保障体系，英国的中国的，我们学校教务处的，我们从外面请的同行专家，国家级教学名师，一个是原来的教育处处长的，一个是院长对我们进行听课，我们还有外国老师来听课，确实把质量抓上去。我认为这就是保障。最重要的就是，我们的学生以后无论是出国还是不出国，我建议他们要以综合性的考试判定学生质量到底是差还是好。我们还有一个质量就是看我们的学生以后到世界名校深造的比率是否达到目标。达到目标我认为质量就是好的，如果没有，质量还要继续抓。

Q：第二个大问题主要是想了解一下学院在保障教育质量方面做了哪些工作？

A：刚刚也断断续续地谈到这些活动，首先，我们的试卷，每次的作业都要求交上来，以判定试卷的水平如何。第二，我们每个月开一次例会，每周开一次集体备课，谈论教学中出现的问题，我每次都会亲自参加。除此以外，我们还会请您代表，班上请几个学生，问他们你认为哪个老师讲的好还是不好，学习兴趣怎么样，积极性怎么样，一个是老师教的怎么样，一个是学生学的怎么样，存在着什么心理问题。不想学的问题在哪里。所以通过开会来了解。还有呢，我们通过教学信息员制度，来自于教务处，从学院里每个班选一两个老师或者学生每学以文字的形式发到教务处去，一旦发现了问题及时反馈。比如说，上个学期学生就抱怨很疲倦，或者呢我很 lucky，我很充实，等等，他们除了英语学得好，还有 PBL，project-based learning，几个人小组写 PPT，我们的本意是提高他们的学习兴趣，同时提高他们英语口语。结果呢他们误解了，以外是 PPT 大赛，每个人把 PPT 做
的非常漂亮。我告诉他们你们讲的很清楚就好了。我们后来在 240 多个 PPT 当中选了几个比较好的印成册，家长看到都很高兴。除此以外呢，我们还请外面的督导来听我们的课。我们的督导也跟我们反应有些老师灌输的多，因为他们很难一下子改过来。我们真正是改进的，基于效果的教和学 outcome based teaching and learning,所以我们叫 OBTL，我们的教学计划也要根据这个来。根据这个有成效的，分层分类别的不同学生的，另外我们还有一个上课也是基于成效的。如果这个班整体不行，就要讲慢一点；如果这个班快于其他班，你不能灌输，学生要多讨论。我经常和学生说，我们把老师比喻成蜡烛，点亮了学生燃烧了自己，我们学生都能够发光，学生也是蜡烛，他也能发光，但是你必须要点燃他，一定要推动他，给他一个机会，让他去发出光芒出来。蜡烛它不会自己亮，必须要有打火机，教师就是干这个活。让他要发出光芒出来，事实证明也是这样，很多学生进来讲不出英语，一年以后很多说流利的英语，通过这种不同的渠道我们在想教学质量。我们还请外国教师来看我们的，他们说你们的考试质量蛮高的，我问他你凭什么判定我们教学质量蛮高的，他说你们有一两个学生考试用中文答卷，结果得了零分。因为学生答不出来嘛，英文不会写，中文能写证明英语不行。

Q：我想了解一下教育部有哪些政策法规对项目审批阶段有较大的影响？

A：教育部最主要的就是引进优质资源。一个是对方合作的学校要是名校，比如格拉斯哥大学和哪个大学合作就比较容易批，因为格拉斯哥大学是名校。第二个是要把教学资源引进来就是教学计划要到中国来讨论。第三个是对方的教师要过来上课，必须要过来上课。你看，我们今天就要英方合作大学的教授陆陆续续来上课。除此以外，我们还把对方的图书资源，文献，慕课课程等（我们现在黑板这个机构合作，他和英国大学合作，他把他的数据给英方合作大学，他在中国有分部，我们的学生只要登录到黑板这个网站就可以查看他们所有的图书资料，文献，慕课课程。以前也可以看，但是网很慢，无法下载。引进优质资源对吧，每个月有一次视频会议，学习国外好的管理经验。同时，[英方合作]大学还培训我们的教师。我们今年暑假有 12 个教师过去培训。教育部喜欢看这些东西，好的管理经验，好的教学经验，毕竟他们办学有一两百年，我们才几十年不到的历史，当然[英方]学院才有几年的历史，因而需要大量的引进好的经验。所以教育部只要是好的学校，然后有一些引进优质资源的措施，那就好批。

Q：审批通过后，教育部会采取哪些跟踪活动呢？

A：定期评估啊，年年要写评估报表啊！每年一次报告，国外教师来了多少，引进优质资源，哪些优质资源，你说你教师又不能编写，护照离境时间，到达时间都有记录，不能弄虚作假的。就看你是是否真正的引进优质资源。

Q：评估报表的准备工作如何？

A：不多，我们很多工作都是记录在案的，拷贝过去没有什么问题。我认为国家教育部也是对我们进行监控，另一个方面也是对我们管理上能够发现问题。所以我觉得还是可以的，我也觉得应该要这样做的。
Q: 那么 [英方合作] 大学是否也有相应的监督措施呢？

A：当然有了，QAA 嘛。以前我们有个 QAA 驻学校的办事，一年经常来几次，相当于教育部有个质量评价体系当中，我们学校有个质量评价员，那个人经常来的啊，来了就听课，开教师座谈会，学生座谈会，跟国际教师座谈，也就是说他们自由地听他们讲对我们的教学质量进行保障。他们现在也认为我们的教学质量没有问题。我们也很乐意他们来，因为我们老讲现在发现问题，如果及时纠正我们就没有什么大的问题，如果说现在的问题看不到那么后面不就有很多问题了嘛。

Q：我听您这么说，双方的交流非常的多。

A：很多很多，一年我们光视频会议就要开很多很多次呢！还有进行来访，我们这边也要出去访问，还有平时的 email，X 院长一年有几百份的 email 通讯。

Q: [英方合作] 大学有什么要求吗？

A：他们要求我们要满足 QAA 的质量体系呀！

Q：学校有什么具体地要求吗？

A：没有，也许他们有，但是官方的讲没有，这个你要问 X 院长去。我们每年有很多次会议，将我们的年度报告告知给[英方]大学，比如说我们有哪些问题取得什么成效。他们的校长，分管外事的副校长也来，还有一个专门的团队。前不久我们在一起参加了一次会议，上上礼拜我们和一个分管科研的领导还有中国项目的经理一起讨论。

Q：英方大学给学院提供哪些帮助呢？

A：这个不同的学校有不同的情况。但是我觉得[英方]大学很好，整体地和英国打交道比较 relaxed，动作慢，中国有句话就是教条式的，很讲规则。但是中国很多事情下面也不好办，你也是中国可能也明白。我们英国合作大学我觉得跟他们合作很愉快。

Q：我觉得很有趣的一点是您刚刚聊到学生和学院的交流，及时反馈学生学习困难。

A：第一个，我们的学生，我们经常给他们开会，请他们讲。第二个，老师很负责。经常晚上给他们辅导。第三个，通过家校合作培养首次家委会，去年成立的，今年就聚到一起，来自全国各地的家长飞过来。
Q：家长是通过什么渠道得知学院的最新动态的呢？

A：就是微信群。我们有一个公众账号，家长通过微信绑定孩子的账号来了解班上具体的学习活动。除此以外，我们还有家委会的公众账号。比如说，昨天学院举办辩论赛，家长都能看的到。我们的微信群里最多的一次有6万多人，都是家长请来的。微信都是学生写的，家长都能看的到。5月1号的三天假期，我们开放了open day, 看孩子的表演，有戏剧有表演有航模比赛，家长看到了都很高兴。

我们还有家长学校。我给他们上课，新世纪中外合作办学的家长，一般要讲2个小时，没有一个人走，他们觉得我讲的很好，我以自己做家长的例子讲我是怎么教育我的孩子的，另外我也做了十几年的老师了。我们也讲怎么与孩子沟通。同时，我们表彰优秀家长，他们是如何在孩子成长过程中发挥作用。你不要以为优秀的孩子才会，最差的学生家长我们指定要培养成优秀家长，一旦孩子有什么问题，我们只要一打电话他就随时跟你沟通，而且主动打电话过来了解孩子的情况，同时和孩子沟通帮助我们做孩子的思想教育工作。这个我们认为要表彰这样的家长，在孩子的成长努力花了很大的力气。所以我们的信息是很及时畅通的。另外我们还有一个群，每个班每个年级都有一个，一有问题，家长都会提的。

Q：这些先进的想法和制度是怎么提出来的？

A：很多都是我们自己做的，我们是[X]省中外合作办学机构示范性，我们有建章立制，各种规章制度，几十种。就是发奖学金也和大校区不一样的呀。比如说学习勤奋，我们都把它细则化，成绩优良，什么叫优？什么叫良？我们也细化。当然这也是我们集体智慧的结晶。大家都争先恐后的加班，做贡献，晚上天天很多职工加班，人事处老师打电话给我们听到我们的老师发这些钱就是头大了。我们认为老师这么辛苦就应该拿这些钱。

Q：那么学院的教学质量保障工作主要由哪一方负责呢？

A：说实话，教学质量工作不能靠一个人。院长我是第一个责任人，教学院长，我们分管学生工作的分院长，负责国际合作的分院长都要承担责任，同时，党委书记也对我们进行监督。我们每一个礼拜的第一个项目就是讨论教学质量，大家都拿点子和主意。重要的是就是抓教育质量。具体地落实到谁呢，两个人，分管学生工作的和分管教师两个副院长他们两个人负责。主要是我们。现在现在学习在我们这里读三年，我们管的多一些，他主要是抽查和监督。

Q：请问您在质量保障工作中遇到过哪些挑战吗？

A：我觉得一个最大的挑战就是和英方合作的一个问题。中国是自上而下的，领导想到了就能把很多老师带动起来。但是英方是自下而上的，他们的校长在和我讨论的时候也说过应该怎么做，但是后来却反映说很难，因为教师过来在这里住了很长时间和我说现在有点难度大，存在着沟通的问题。所以我们更要增进沟通，说明彼此之间的模糊。打个比方就是[英方]大学和[中方]新婚，生的第一个儿子就是[合作]学院，他们两方进行磨合。我经常说，你们两个人都是我们的老板，我不能得罪你们两方，我要平衡你们两方。比如说，我要抓很多事情，只要我和中方的校长说，他只要支持一句话这
个事情就能做起来，但是我和英方的校长说，但是我讲完了他经常告诉我这个事情他做不了，因为他是自下而上的。这个体系就存在着我们要加强沟通磨合，老师来我们说服老师，只要老师支持回去就比较好办。管理体制，文化素养，思想差异，遇到第一个挑战，怎样的沟通能够把我们的父母亲搞好事情就好办了。质量不仅要抓中方教师的质量还要抓英方教师的质量。

第二个挑战就是我们感到中国毕竟这是一个新生事物，很多优秀的孩子还不愿意考我们学院，因而我们的学生生源质量不高。高考考试本一，比其他学院要低，因为我们贵嘛。招生难，很多人要报[中方合作大学]，但是不一定想进我们学院，结果考上了还要退档；但是明确想报我们学院的呢，分数又不一定够。但是我希望经过我们几年的努力，我们要超过他们学院。

Q：总体来说，您认为中外合作办学质量保障方面中英双方最大差异是什么呢？

A：最大的差异就是质量保障，确确实实是不同的文化和制度造成的。你要讲起来，我们和教师发展中心主任沟通管理体制的时候，发现我们的问题是差不多的，就是老师重视科研，不热衷于教学，对教学有应付，对质量可能管的不严。所以他们现在在抓教学采取了措施。我们也是这样的。我们现在也在抓教学，要办好一件事情，花的时间越多，质量才越高。肯花时间，肯和学生沟通，肯去大量时间备课，我们的 office hour 每周老师两次，晚上自己回去，礼拜六老师也来，这个要花时间。他们和我们是一样的。但是文化差异，我们的老师习惯于课堂灌输，国外呢可能课堂互动比较多。差异在于，从我的角度来觉得呢，差异最大是中国的传统教育跟英国大学教育传统上的差异。我们的教育叫什么？授业解惑，传授知识。国外教育叫什么？学习能力的培养。学习好是因为学习能力强。我们学习成绩表明知识扎实啊！我觉得中国的做法既要有知识的传授也有能力的培养。刚才我们讲到我们引进了翻转课堂，PBL、OBTL，这些教学模式，以及与中国传统的模式相结合，我们的学生培养的就是相当好。

Q：不仅仅是学习西方，而是将两者的优势相结合。

A：那当然了，并不是说西方的就好，他们多少也要一些缺陷。但是只缘身在此山中很难看到自己的缺陷。他们说你们中国的课堂满堂灌，我问他们那为什么中国的数学考试比你们棒呢！我们的学生只要英语干上了就比他们棒呢，比率高呢，因为我们的基础知识扎实啊！