

Employment Prospects of Graduates From Sino-Foreign Cooperative Universities in China

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Abstract

This article aims to examine the employment prospects of graduates from Sino-foreign cooperative universities (SFCUs) compared with those from local Chinese universities. Drawing on the annual employment quality reports released by six SFCUs, the findings indicated that SFCU graduates had distinct advantages in terms of both further study and direct employment. Specifically, the overall employment rate reached 95.84%; over half of the graduates pursued further study abroad in world-class foreign universities, close to one-third continued further studies in elite domestic universities, and one-sixth were employed by transnational or local large organizations. These results suggest that SFCU graduates were equipped with distinct competitive advantages for employment, further supported by an affluent family background and the high-quality requirement for admission. Meanwhile, the findings also raise concerns about brain drain, economic flows, overeducation, reduced entrepreneurial passion, and unemployment dilemma for graduates from lesser known SFCUs.

Keywords

Sino-foreign cooperative universities, internationalization, graduate employment, overseas study, entrepreneurship

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Introduction

The rapid growth in the economy and the massification of higher education in China (Mok & Jiang, 2017) have been accompanied by an increasingly prominent tension between the growing demand for advanced higher education resources and an insufficient supply. Hence, a growing number of middle-class families in China are sending their children to study abroad, aiming to equip them with advanced knowledge and skills, enhance their employability, promote their career development, and eventually achieve upward socioeconomic mobility (Huang & Turner, 2018; Ji, 2011).

Despite the substantial benefits of studying abroad, an array of serious problems, such as high cost, religious and ethnicity issues, personal and property safety, and culture shock, present challenges to international students (Nicholls, 2018; Zhai et al., 2019). To satisfy the accelerating demand for high-quality educational institutes and to mitigate public concerns about the risk of studying abroad, China has committed to internationalizing higher education through the establishment of Sino-foreign cooperative universities (SFCUs), which are jointly run by a local Chinese university and a well-known foreign university. Due to the high reputations of the collaborators; the stringent authorization procedures undertaken only by the Chinese Ministry of Education (Feng, 2013); the substantial support in terms of policy, finances, land, and autonomy; and the striking convenience of pursuing transnational higher education without physical relocation (Bannier, 2016; Knight, 2015), SFCUs have attracted attention from local governments, social organizations, and motivated parents who want to send their children abroad but are also worried about the challenges presented above.

SFCUs have also drawn increasing attention from researchers. Feng (2013) studied the pathway toward the internationalization of higher education in China by analyzing the differences between two representative SFCUs in rationales, strategies, curricula, partnerships, and orientations. Yafen Xu and Sun (2016) inspected the differences in teaching concepts, targets, processes, and evaluations between SFCUs and public universities, confirming that students at SFCUs had advantages in innovation performance, international perspective, and career competitiveness. Similarly, Sun (2016) highlighted that the integration of curricular internationalization and localization in SFCUs contributed to the cultivation of the “China mood” and the international perspective of students, which strengthened their competencies for career promotion regardless of whether their career was domestic or overseas. Similarly, Yuyu Xu and Hua (2018) reported that teaching in English provided students with a real-world environment of cross-cultural learning and a high likelihood of acceptance for opportunities abroad after completing their degrees. L. Yang et al. (2014) investigated the academic productivity of SFCUs using bibliometric analysis, finding that SFCUs had stronger academic influence within the international academic community in social science, arts, and humanities than top local universities; thus, students’ professionalism and academic abilities were equal to those of their counterparts studying at local elite universities. Xie (2018) demonstrated that the colorful and multicultural student activities available at SFCUs helped students to adapt better when later studying and living abroad.

Although previous research has greatly enriched our understanding of the benefits of studying at SFCUs and the operations of them, most prior studies focused on the “input” of resources, including advanced campus facilities, international curricula design, English language teaching, and interlinkage with foreign universities. Few studies have focused on the “output” of graduates: How did graduates use their cross-cultural learning experiences and international academic insights to realize their career aspirations? What is the relationship between the reputation of the SFCU, quality of graduates, family background, and career pathways? What is the role of SFCUs in facilitating the internationalization of higher education and student mobility? There is a critical lack of empirical data that illustrates the extent to which graduates from SFCUs have successful employment outcomes, and this topic deserves further research.

To bridge these gaps, we sought to investigate the “output” of SFCUs from a holistic perspective. Specifically, we attempted to explore the employment outcomes of SFCU graduates compared with those from local Chinese universities. In examining this issue, this article not only makes an essential contribution to the SFCU literature and, more specifically, to the literature on employment and career agency but also provides instrumental suggestions for parents and students about how to access cross-border learning domestically (Knight & Liu, 2016; Rumbley & Altbach, 2016) and for other stakeholders such as governments and universities about how to promote win-win cooperative universities.

Method

Data Sources

The data were collected from the annual reports on graduate employment quality that have been released by SFCUs since 2013. By the end of April 2019, the Chinese Ministry of Education had approved nine SFCUs, of which three had no graduates at the time of the study. Consequently, the research samples consisted of 21 reports from six SFCUs: the University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC), Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College (UIC), Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), New York University Shanghai (NYU-Shanghai), Wenzhou-Kean University (WKU), and The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen (CUHK-Shenzhen). More detailed demographic information can be found in Table 1.

Data Analysis

A systematic inductive content analysis approach was used to extract and summarize the employment information of the graduates from the six SFCUs. In the Chinese context, “*Employment*” is broadly defined as the outcome after graduation and includes job acquisition, further study, and entrepreneurship; it is a significant statistical dimension and criterion for evaluating the quality of a university education and resource distribution by the Chinese government.

Table 1. The Samples of Six SFCUs in China.

University	Year est.	Year of sample	Location	Foreign university	Year est.	U.S. new ranking 2019	Sino university	Year est.	U.S. new ranking 2019	Tuition per year (US\$)
UNNC	2004	2015–2018 (4)	Ningbo, Zhejiang	University of Nottingham, UK	1881	145	Zhejiang Wanli University	1950	NA	13,005
UIC	2005	2013–2018 (6)	Zhuhai, Guangdong	Hong Kong Baptist University	1956	545	Beijing Normal University	1902	330	11,560
XJTLU	2006	2014–2018 (5)	Suzhou, Jiangsu	University of Liverpool	1881	130	Xi'an Jiaotong University	1896	356	12,716
NYU-Shanghai	2011	2017–2018 (2)	Shanghai	New York University	1831	28	East China Normal University	1951	497	17,340–20,610
WKU	2011	2016–2018 (3)	Wenzhou, Jiangsu	Kean University	1855	NA	Wenzhou University	1933	NA	6,500
CUHK-Shenzhen	2014	2018 (1)	Shenzhen, Guangdong	Chinese University of Hong Kong	1963	142	Shenzhen University	1983	689	13,727

Note. UNNC = University of Nottingham Ningbo China; UIC = Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College; XJTLU = Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University; NYU-Shanghai = New York University Shanghai; WKU = Wenzhou-Kean University; CUHK-Shenzhen = The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen.

Specifically, the data analysis procedure included three steps. First, all employment information was initially divided into four categories: further study, direct employment, entrepreneurship, and unemployment. Second, each group was further subdivided into different dimensions according to the study destination, employer attributes, and industries of entrepreneurship. Finally, a detailed multidimensional employment data set was constructed to describe and analyze the employment statuses of the graduates from the six SFCUs. These data then allowed a comparison between graduates of the SFCUs, graduates from local Chinese universities, and graduates of the top 7 Chinese universities, which represent the highest quality level in the Chinese higher education system: Tsinghua University (THU), Peking University (PKU), and East China Five Universities, namely, Fudan University (FDU), Shanghai Jiaotong University (SJTU), Zhejiang University (ZJU), Nanjing University (NJU), and University of Science and Technology of China (USTC).

Findings

Further Study

Study abroad. The reports revealed that studying at an SFCU can benefit students in their further studies, especially overseas studies. As shown in Table 2, 65.19% of graduates chose to continue their studies abroad. At the university level, the proportion of total graduates who studied overseas was 76.47% at XJTLU, 62.87% at CUHK-Shenzhen, and more than 50% at the remaining SFCUs. In 2018, the percentage of graduates studying abroad exceeded 80% at UNNC and XJTLU, was more than 60% at UIC and WKU, and was close to 60% at NYU-Shanghai and CUHK-Shenzhen, and this percentage presented a gradual upward trend. The average rate of 67.77% of students studying overseas was far higher than that of local Chinese universities (2.1%) and also much higher than that of the top 7 Chinese universities (approximately 15.52%).

Despite the diverse relocations abroad, the home countries or regions of the foreign partner universities were the most popular destinations for SFCU graduates. According to the 2018 data, as presented in Table 3, 74.34% of graduates from XJTLU and 65.6% from UNNC pursued further study in the United Kingdom, whereas 80% of graduates from NYU-Shanghai continued their education in the United States or Canada, and 36.84% from WKU chose to study in the United States. As Hong Kong has historically been deeply exposed to British culture (Ralston et al., 1993), graduates from UIC who studied abroad were approximately equally distributed among the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and Australia, which all have British-style education systems, at approximately 29%, 27.67%, and 26.54%, respectively; meanwhile, the prevalent destination for graduates from CUHK-Shenzhen was the United States, accounting for 31.82%, followed by Hong Kong with 25.57%. In general, graduates from six SFCUs preferred to study in Western developed countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, which have always offered the highest level of higher education worldwide. The choice of overseas study destinations is consistent

Table 2. Further Study of Graduates From SFCUs and Comparison With Chinese Local Universities in 2018.

University	Total graduates	Total number of further study	Rate of further study (%)	Study domestically	Rate of study domestically	Study abroad	Rate of study abroad	Rate of study domestically in 2018 (%)	Rate of study abroad in 2018 (%)	Total in 2018 (%)
UNNC	6,399	3,925	61.34	94	1.47	3,831	59.87	0.63	82.77	83.40
UIC	6,997	4,042	57.77	131	1.87	3,911	55.90	2.87	67.06	69.93
XJTU	10,073	7,855	77.98	152	1.51	7,703	76.47	0.06	86.38	86.44
NYU-Shanghai	285	153	53.68	0	0.00	153	53.68	0.00	57.00	57.00
WKU	837	452	54.00	12	1.43	440	52.57	0.53	60.80	61.33
CUHK-Shenzhen	272	176	64.71	5	1.84	171	62.87	13.07	52.60	65.67
Total SFCUs	23,785	16,603	66.78	394	1.58	16,209	65.19	2.86	67.77	70.63
THU								28.50	16.50	45.00
PKU								20.11	15.21	35.32
FDU								17.08	12.95	37.36
SJTU								24.41	12.95	37.36
ZJU								23.53	13.11	36.64
NJU								22.38	10.10	32.48
USTC								46.20	27.80	74.00
Total Chinese local universities								14.70	2.10	16.80

Note. SFCUs = Sino-foreign cooperative universities; UNNC = University of Nottingham Ningbo China; UIC = Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College; XJTU = Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University; NYU-Shanghai = New York University Shanghai; WKU = Wenzhou Kean University; CUHK-Shenzhen = The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen; THU = Tsinghua University; PKU = Peking University; FDU = Fudan University; SJTU = Shanghai Jiaotong University; ZJU = Zhejiang University; NJU = Nanjing University; USTC = University of Science and Technology of China.

Table 3. Overseas Destinations of Graduates From SFCUs and Comparison With Chinese Local Universities in 2018.

Destination	UIC (%)	UNNC (%)	XJTLU (%)	NYU-Shanghai (%)	WKU (%)	CUHK-Shenzhen (%)	THU (%)	PKU (%)	FDU (%)	SJTU (%)	ZJU (%)	NJU (%)	USTC (%)	Total Chinese local universities (%)
UK	29.43	65.60	74.34	UK and the Netherlands 9.00	16.67	11.36	8.10	9.23	13.23	7.21	11.42	/		19.00
The Netherlands		1.00	0.17						2.00		0.53			
Australia	26.54	13.70	11.35	4.00	21.49	5.68	2.10	2.61	4.00	3.74	5.18		4.95	14.00
Hong Kong	27.67	2.70	4.55	7.00		25.57	5.30	5.49	8.75	6.23			8.70	3.00
USA	10.57	11.20	6.67	USA and Canada 80.00	36.84	31.82	69.50	59.84	58.27	63.58	69.05		66.20	25.00
Canada	1.38	1.00	0.38			1.14	2.00	1.74	1.00	2.05	2.12		1.65	10.00
Singapore	1.01	0.60	0.38			3.98	1.70	1.66	2.00	1.87	6.77		4.95	2.00
French	0.75		0.26			1.70	1.00	2.18	2.00	2.40				3.00
Japan		0.90	0.26			0.57	3.10	3.66	5.00	3.74	2.26		2.70	6.00
German		0.60	0.19				2.40	2.70		3.03	1.06			2.00
Sweden			0.19			0.57	1.60	1.66		2.14	0.53			
Spain			0.19			0.57								
Italy			0.06			1.70								
Others	2.65	3.30	1.01	0.00	25.00	15.34	3.20	9.23	3.75	4.01	1.08		10.85	16.00

Note. Bold values reflect highest ratio. SFCUs = Sino-foreign cooperative universities; UIC = Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College; UNNC = University of Nottingham Ningbo China; XJTLU = Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University; NYU-Shanghai = New York University Shanghai; WKU = Wenzhou-Kean University; CUHK-Shenzhen = The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen; THU = Tsinghua University; PKU = Peking University; FDU = Fudan University; SJTU = Shanghai Jiaotong University; ZJU = Zhejiang University; NJU = Nanjing University; USTC = University of Science and Technology of China.

with that of Chinese graduates from both the top 7 universities and local universities. For example, the United States attracted 25% of all Chinese graduates and 60% of graduates from the seven elite universities to pursue further study abroad in 2018.

Regarding the quality of foreign universities attended by graduates, a large number of graduates from SFCUs had the opportunity to access world-class universities overseas. In contrast, more than half of Chinese international students studied at universities ranking outside of the top 500 (Hao & Welch, 2012; Zweig & Han, 2010). As described in Table 4, several graduates studied at Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Yale, which are ranked as the top 3 universities in the U.S. News Global University Ranking 2019. In addition, some graduates from XJTLU and UNNC pursued study at Oxford and Cambridge, which represent the top universities in the United Kingdom. However, in terms of the number of graduates, University College London (UCL) attracted the most graduates from XJTLU and UNNC, with 372 and 142 students, respectively, as well as Imperial College London, which attracted 37 and 118 students, respectively. Moreover, both Columbia University and Johns Hopkins University recruited a substantial percentage of graduates from all six SFCUs.

Although the universities where NYU-Shanghai graduates subsequently enrolled have not been reported, the locations where they studied were widely distributed among the top universities in the United States and concentrated in the top 10 world-class universities. In comparison, some of the graduates from WKU attended universities ranked 17th to 20th, which can be attributed to the comparatively low reputation of the cooperative university. The prestige of universities where graduates of the two Hong Kong-affiliated SFCUs subsequently studied was remarkably similar; a relatively large number from UIC went to UCL and Johns Hopkins University, whereas some graduates from CUHK-Shenzhen also pursued further studies at the University of Oxford.

Graduates from SFCUs achieved equal success in terms of the quantity and quality of further study compared with graduates from local Chinese elite universities, especially graduates from the two U.K.-affiliated SFCUs. In 2018, the number of graduates who studied at Oxford and Cambridge after graduation from UNNC and XJTLU even surpassed that of the East China Five universities. Notably, the population of Chinese mainland graduates from XJTLU who studied at Cambridge exceeded that of THU and PKU (Ranking, 2019a). This finding provides strong evidence that SFCUs are recognized by higher education institutions in the United Kingdom, which dramatically promotes the potential for further study at well-known British universities.

Domestic study. Table 2 also shows that the cohort who chose to study in China accounted for only 1.58% of all SFCU graduates. At the university level, 1.87% of all graduates from UIC opted to continue studying domestically after obtaining their degree, whereas none of the graduates from NUY-Shanghai chose a local Chinese university for further study. The tendency toward domestic studies was highly variable. In 2018, the percentage of graduates studying domestically from UNNC, XJTLU, and WKU dropped far lower than 1%, whereas that of graduates from UIC increased

Table 4. Overseas Universities of Graduates From SFCUs and Comparison With Chinese Local Universities (2018).

U.S. new ranking 2019	Further study university	UIC	UNINC	XJTLU	NYU- Shanghai	CUHK- Shenzhen	THU	PKU	FDU	SJTU	ZJU	NJU	USTC
1	Harvard University			1	✓		38	31	10	6	8	7	/
2	MIT				✓		30	17	11	5	3	1	
3	Stanford University		1				34	17	9	4	5	6	
4	University of California, Berkeley						35	21	8	20	14	3	
5	University of Oxford		6	11	✓	✓	8	15	4	5	3	2	
6	California Institute of Technology						5	7	0	2	4	4	
7	University of Cambridge		3	11			10	7	2	2	1	3	
8	Columbia University	1	12	11	✓	9	57	66	50	30	54	42	
9	Princeton University				✓		23	23	5	3	2	3	
10	University of Washington			1	✓		14	1	/	13	10	8	
11	Yale University						17	17	7	13	16	5	
12	Johns Hopkins University	10	4	7	✓	8	20	18	18	18	28	17	
13	University of California—Los Angeles		2		✓	✓	32	17	7	9	14	11	
14	The University of Chicago		2		✓	✓	16	55	16	4	7	12	

(continued)

Table 4. (continued)

U.S. new ranking 2019	Further study university	UIC	UNNC	XJTLU	NYU- Shanghai	WKU	CUHK- Shenzhen	THU	PKU	FDU	SJTU	ZJU	NJU	USTC
16	University of Pennsylvania		2	4	√			23	26	15	20	21	6	
17	University of California—San Diego		2			1		25	15	11	47	32	16	
18	University of Michigan—Ann Arbor		1	3		1	√	28	20	14	68	8	12	
18	Imperial College London		37	118				10	2	6	2	12	6	
20	University of Toronto	1	4	2				5	6	1	4	9	4	
21	UCL	17	142	372		4		16	15	19	11	29	20	
22	Duke University		2	1			√	24	17	11	8	17	18	
23	Cornell University		1	3	√		√	29	22	21	30	25	17	
24	Northwestern University	1				1		15	10	13	14	14	7	
25	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich							12	12	1	6	3	6	

Note. √ imply universities that did not report the accurate number of graduates. SFCUs = Sino-foreign cooperative universities; UIC = Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College; UNNC = University of Nottingham Ningbo China; XJTLU = Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University; NYU-Shanghai = New York University Shanghai; WKU = Wenzhou-Kean University; CUHK-Shenzhen = The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen; THU = Tsinghua University; PKU = Peking University; FDU = Fudan University; SJTU = Shanghai Jiaotong University; ZJU = Zhejiang University; NJU = Nanjing University; USTC = University of Science and Technology of China; UCL = University College London; MIT = Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

to 2.87% and that of those from CUHK-Shenzhen increased dramatically to 13.07%. In contrast, the percentage of graduates from local Chinese universities studying domestically exceeded 14% that of the seven elite universities averaged 26%. The extremely minimal percentage of graduates studying in the home country further accounted for the privilege of potentially pursuing degrees abroad for graduates from SFCUs.

For the few SFCU graduates who chose to pursue further study domestically, most had the opportunity to enter a top Chinese university. As shown in Table 5, most graduates from XJTLU pursued universities within the top 100 ranking, whereas all graduates from CUHK-Shenzhen stayed at their alma mater for further study, joined by some graduates from UNNC and XJTLU. The exception was graduates from UIC, who pursued further study in local Chinese universities ranked below top 100. Comparatively, all graduates from the seven elite universities preferred to study at top-tier Chinese universities with reputations equal to that of their alma mater.

Direct Employment

As reported in Table 6, more than 45% of graduates from NYU-Shanghai were successful in finding a job. Similarly, more than 30% of graduates from UNNC, UIC, CNHK-Shenzhen, and WKU, as well as close to one-fifth of graduates from XJTLU, were employed successfully. However, in 2018, the percentage of direct employment for graduates from the six SFCUs showed a downward trend. The average 24.48% of graduates from SFCUs involved in the labor market was much lower than that of graduates from local Chinese universities (73.6%).

At the institute level, more than 80% of SFCU job applicants preferred to work in leading innovative ventures, of which 51.33% preferred private ventures, 19.5% preferred Sino-foreign joint ventures, and only 10.36% preferred state-owned ventures. Among them, most were employed by global top 500 enterprises, Big Four accounting firms, and Chinese top 500 enterprises. Only 18.82% of graduates preferred to enter the institutional system and work for the government, research institutes, banks, or the military. Similarly, four-fifths of graduates from local Chinese universities preferred large innovative firms for employment. Graduates seemed to have more interest in dynamic challenging work in a large organization than in routine or repetitive work (Zhang et al., 2016).

At the industry level, more than 20% of graduates worked in business, followed by 17.72% in finance, 10.8% in culture and education, and 8% in internet-related fields. The results imply that the six SFCUs have all established conventional disciplines and applied majors that meet the demands for promoting economic development. In comparison, less than 2% of graduates found jobs in retail and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which required relatively lower professional knowledge and qualifications. The same situation can be found in the distribution of industries employing graduates from local Chinese universities, as more than 21% worked in business, education, or culture and more than 8% worked in finance, internet-related businesses, and manufacturing.

Table 5. Domestic Study of Graduates From SFCUs and Comparison With Chinese Local Universities in 2018.

Further study university	U.S. new ranking 2019	U.S. new Chinese ranking 2019	XJTLU	UIC	UNNC	WKU	CUHK- Shenzhen	NYU- Shanghai	THU	PKU	FDU	SJTU	ZJU	NJU	USTC
PKU	68	2				√			/	/	1. double top-class university	1. SHJT	1. ZJU	/	1. USTC
CUHK-Shenzhen	142 (HK)	/					√		/	/	2. CAS	2. FDU	2. SHJT		2. UCAS
NJU	179	7	√									3. THU	3. THU		3. THU
Tongji University	302	12	√									4. CAS	4. PKU		4. PKU
Beijing Normal University	330	13										5. PKU	5. FDU		5. SHJT
Xiamen University	336	14	√	√								6. Tongji	6. CAS		6. FDU
Xi'an Jiaotong University	356	16	√									7. Zhejiang	7. Wuhan		7. Nanjing
Jilin University	480	28	√									8. Nanjing	8. Nanjing		8. Others
Sichuan University	494	30	√												
Renmin University of China	621	39			√										
Chongqing University	627	41			√										
Harbin Engineering University	802	60	√												
Nanjing University of Posts & Telecommunications	1,060	96	√												
Yunnan University	1,070	97		√											
Southwestern university of finance and economics	/	/		√											
Nanjing Audit University	/	/		√											
China Foreign Affairs University	/	/		√											

(continued)

Table 5. (continued)

Further study university	U.S. new ranking 2019	U.S. new Chinese ranking 2019	XJTU	UIC	UNNC	WKU	CUHK-Shenzhen	NYU-Shanghai	THU	PKU	FDU	SJTU	ZJU	NJU	USTC
Guizhou University of Finance and Economics	/	/		✓											
Northwest University of Political Science and Law	/	/		✓											
Shanghai University of Finance and Economics	/	/		✓											
Hunan Normal University	/	/		✓											
Communication University of China	/	/	✓	✓											
Huaqiao University	/	/		✓											
University of International Business and Economics	/	/		✓											
XJTU	/	/	✓												
Ningxia University	/	/	✓												
UNNC	/	/			✓										
China Academy of Art	/	/											✓		

Note. ✓ imply universities that did not report the accurate number of graduates. SFCUs = Sino-foreign cooperative universities; XJTU = Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University; UIC = Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College; UNNC = University of Nottingham Ningbo China; WKU = Wenzhou-Kean University; CUHK-Shenzhen = The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen; NYU-Shanghai = New York University Shanghai; THU = Tsinghua University; PKU = Peking University; FDU = Fudan University; SJTU = Shanghai Jiaotong University; ZJU = Zhejiang University; NJU = Nanjing University; USTC = University of Science and Technology of China; CAS = Chinese Academy of Sciences; SHJT = Shanghai Jiao Tong University; UCAS = University of Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Table 6. Direct Employment of Graduates From SFCUs and Comparison With Chinese Local Universities in 2018.

University	Main employers										Main industry										Employment satisfaction (2018)				
	Ratio of direct employment (%)	Ratio of direct employment in 2018 (%)	Private ventures (%)	Sino-foreign joint ventures (%)	State-owned ventures (%)	Government institute (%)	Institute/ bank (%)	Business (%)	Financial (%)	Internet (%)	Retail (%)	Culture education (%)	Film media (%)	Gov./ NGO (%)	Manufactory (%)	Real estate (%)	Other (%)	Average salary (US\$)	Match of major (%)	Job satisfaction (%)	Satisfaction with alma mater (%)				
UNNC	35.63	13.40	34.21	13.68	9.69	5.49	4.99	31.94	9.64	12.95	5.37	4.02	11.10	/	0.08	5.60	3.85	47.39	1,378 (MA)	/	88.00	/			
UIC	30.73	19.77	73.72	18.84	1.49	2.16	2.23	1.56	46.17	13.55	12.14	/	13.85	2.53	2.53	2.01	/	7.22	924 (BA)	70.04	90.34	85.01%			
XJTU	19.78	11.49	49.86	24.17	19.47	3.75	1.96	0.79	9.72	24.65	6.28	0.14	7.09	3.40	1.91	10.36	13.85	22.60	/	92.13	94.56	98.67%			
NYU-Shanghai	45.96	42	13.11	57.21	9.84	0.00	7.38	12.46	43.93	15.46	11.90	/	11.95	8.36	/	/	/	8.40	/	/	/	/			
WKU	37.87	27.73	47.24	16.54	18.90	15.75	1.18	0.39	4.64	35.80	6.75	2.11	8.39	/	9.31	5.06	1.69	26.25	822 (BA)	70.21	91.30	98.39%			
CUHK-Shenzhen	33.46	32.46	52.87	34.48	8.05	1.50	1.50	1.60	25.29	24.14	18.39	10.34	10.34	/	/	/	5.75	5.75	/	/	/	/			
Chinese local universities	/	73.60	54.00	7.00	19.00	4.28	3.10	11.44	21.57	8.10	8.80	4.00	19.10 (Education)	6.00	8.05	2.40	25.65	726.85	71.00	68.00	93				

Note. SFCUs = Sino-foreign cooperative universities; NGO = nongovernmental organizations; UNNC = University of Nottingham Ningbo China; UIC = Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College; XJTU = Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University; NYU-Shanghai = New York University Shanghai; WKU = Wenzhou-Kean University; CUHK-Shenzhen = The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen.

Moreover, according to a survey conducted by several SFCUs for graduate feedback in 2018, the average salary of SFCU graduates was US\$839 monthly, which is much higher than the average US\$726 received by graduates from local universities, whereas the pretax salary of SFCU graduates with a master's degree reached more than US\$1,378. Graduates' professional suitability for their job positions exceeded 70%, which allowed them to appropriately apply their university degrees to their jobs. More importantly, more than 90% of graduates were satisfied with their occupation, which is far higher than the 68% of graduates from local universities who were satisfied. In addition, the level of satisfaction with their alma maters was 94.02% on average, which is slightly higher than 93% of graduates from local Chinese universities.

Entrepreneurship

Table 7 indicates that less than 1% of graduates from SFCUs chose to start a business or become self-employed, which was 1.18% lower than the national entrepreneurship rate of graduates (MyCos, 2018). An indirect explanation may be that graduates from SFCUs were unaware of entrepreneurship or that entrepreneurship was unnecessary for them because of their overwhelming advantages in pursuing further study and employment. According to a report released by UIC, the industries in which the graduates aimed to establish themselves were typically business services, education, and culture. These three industries were likely preferred by graduates from other SFCUs, excluding NYU-Shanghai, due to their professional suitability for the job positions. Comparatively, more than one-fifth of graduates from local Chinese universities engaged in entrepreneurship in the educational industry.

Unemployment

As shown in Table 8, the overall rate of unemployment of graduates from SFCUs was 4.16%. In 2018, the average unemployment rate was 4.48%, which was far lower than the 9% for local Chinese graduates (MyCos, 2018). Unfortunately, graduates from UIC and WKU encountered serious employment difficulties, with unemployment rates of 9.63% and 10.94%, respectively. In comparison, few students from other universities failed to find jobs, especially those attending NYU-Shanghai, which had an unemployment rate of only 1%. This finding provides evidence that there is a stable linkage between employment success and the quality and reputation of universities (Harvey, 2000).

Discussion

Reasons for the Prosperous Employment Outcomes of Graduates From SFCUs

For many decades, it has been argued that graduates have faced serious employment problems since the expansion of Chinese higher education in 1998 (Chan, 2015; Liu,

Table 7. Entrepreneurship of Graduates From SFCUs and Comparison With Chinese Local Universities in 2018.

Sino-foreign university	Total entrepreneurship	Rate of entrepreneurship (%)	Ratio of entrepreneurship in 2018 (%)	Industry
UNNC	54	0.84	0.47	/
UIC	87	1.24	0.67	Business Service (37) Education (9) Culture (7) Restaurant (5) Financial (3) Science and Technology (3) Retail (3) E-trade (3) Agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fisheries (2) Other (15)
XJTLU	77	0.76	0.96	/
NYU-Shanghai	0	0.00	0	/
WKU	2	0.24	0	/
CUHK-Shenzhen	1	0.37	0.37	/
Total Chinese local universities	/	/	1.80	Education (21.1%)

Note. SFCUs = Sino-foreign cooperative universities; UNNC = University of Nottingham Ningbo China; UIC = Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College; XJTLU = Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University; NYU-Shanghai = New York University Shanghai; WKU = Wenzhou-Kean University; CUHK-Shenzhen = The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen.

2015). However, the findings in this case do not thoroughly support the idea that Chinese graduates are facing severe unemployment issues, despite the existing competition. The overall employment rate of graduates from SFCUs has reached 95.84%, which is 3% higher than that of national graduates, and the quality of employment is also comparably very high. It can be inferred that graduates from SFCUs have few worries about employment. As some studies have argued, employment outcomes and occupational attainment are mainly affected not only by ascribed factors such as family background but also by achieved factors such as individual effort and university reputation (Chan, 2014; Stenstrom et al., 2013). Therefore, the high-quality employment outcomes of graduates from SFCUs depend on at least the following three determinants.

First, the fact that the vast majority of graduates study abroad implies that most of them are from families with a strong financial background and without worries about high education expenditures. Some researchers have demonstrated that affordability is not considered an important factor affecting international academic mobility by Chinese students from rich families (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2017; Nicholls, 2018). It is also shown in this study that SFCUs are much more expensive than the cost of US\$722.5 per year for regular public universities. As shown in Table 1, NYU-Shanghai

Table 8. Unemployment of Graduates From SFCUs and Comparison With Chinese Local Universities in 2018.

SFCUs	Total unemployment	Rate of unemployment (%)	Rate of unemployment in 2018 (%)
UNNC	140	2.19	2.73
UIC	718	10.26	9.63
XJTLU	149	1.48	1.11
NYU-Shanghai	1	0.35	1.00
WKU	66	7.89	10.94
CUHK-Shenzhen	4	1.47	1.50
Total	1,078	4.16	4.48
Total Chinese local universities	/	/	9.00

Note. SFCUs = Sino-foreign cooperative universities; UNNC = University of Nottingham Ningbo China; UIC = Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College; XJTLU = Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University; NYU-Shanghai = New York University Shanghai; WKU = Wenzhou-Kean University; CUHK-Shenzhen = The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen.

had the highest tuition fee of US\$20,610 per academic year, which is 28 times that of ordinary universities, whereas the lowest tuition, at WKU, still reached US\$6,500, which is 9 times that of the ordinary public universities. In addition, the cost of accommodation and books at SFCUs is strikingly higher than that at public universities. Despite providing some scholarships, the total cost of 4 years of study at an SFCU significantly exceeds that of other domestic universities. The ability to afford such tuition implies that the graduates of SFCUs are similarly free from financial constraints in pursuing their overseas education dreams after graduation.

Second, graduates receiving offers from world-class universities and local elite universities, well-known domestic and foreign enterprises, and government core sectors manifested diligent and excellent academic performance. According to the quality index of student resources of China's best universities in 2019, CUHK-Shenzhen ranked 28th in freshmen college entrance examination scores (*gaokao*), ahead of most Chinese world-class universities, whereas UNNC ranked 105th, which is still not inferior to some first-class Chinese universities in specific disciplines; XJTLU, UIC, and WKU ranked at the same level as key universities affiliated with provincial governments (Ranking, 2019b). Students with excellent performance in *gaokao* are regarded, to some extent, as having industrious attributes, strong learning abilities, and professional knowledge, which are important generic features of employability (Hager & Holland, 2006) that enable graduates to stand out in career development, especially when applying for overseas study. Moreover, as mentioned above, strong financial support from families guaranteed that the students could devote their time to their studies instead of needing to work part-time to cover living expenses or tuition fees.

Third, the low unemployment rate indicates that SFCUs, with their intercultural context, equip graduates with significant competitive advantages for further study, direct employment, and entrepreneurship. Studying in a cofounded university with advanced facilities, foreign teachers, international curriculums, and twin programs (Knight & Liu, 2016) allows graduates to obtain international study experience and global employability in terms of their worldviews, attitudes, specializations, and transferable skills (Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Jones, 2013). Most crucially, they are awarded degree certificates from cooperative foreign universities, which is almost equally beneficial as studying at a foreign university; these degrees hold equivalent value to those held by international graduates (Hao et al., 2016). In addition, their relatively high employment probability and primary salary can be attributed to the reputation of SFCUs among both foreign collaborative universities and local entities. As Drydakis (2015) noted, graduates from highly reputable universities were deemed more capable and motivated than graduates from less renowned universities, with a remarkably greater chance of receiving an interview invitation, earning a significantly higher salary, and advancing their career development.

Reflections on the Employment Flow of Graduates From SFCUs

Despite their substantial benefits in meeting diverse educational needs, promoting innovation in the Chinese higher education system (Lin, 2016), offering a Western university experience, building English proficiency, and providing close connections with foreign host universities, there are some concerns about the employment flow of graduates from SFCUs that cannot be ignored.

First, the fact that close to two-thirds of graduates from SFCUs pursue overseas studies is likely to aggravate brain drain in the Chinese economy. A key motivation for higher education internationalization is to earn money by charging high fees to international students (Altbach & Knight, 2007). For years, China has been the largest exporter of international students, who are most often destined for developed Western countries, especially English-speaking countries (Altbach & Reisberg, 2018; Liyanage & Nima, 2016), and most of them initiate their international studies themselves, contributing significant income to the host countries (Altbach, 2004). For example, Chinese students comprise one-third of the total international students in American universities and contribute nearly US\$13 billion annually to the U.S. economy (Post, 2019). Despite a recently growing reverse trend in which an increasing number of graduates who studied abroad are returning to China upon graduation, spurred by more job opportunities and a better economic situation (Gu, 2016), the number of students studying abroad is still growing rapidly, with a compound annual growth rate of 13.9% over the past 10 years (MoE, 2019). Therefore, it is urgent for developing countries such as China and India to become deeply integrated into the global economy and higher education system to attract more students to study domestically and reduce economic drain (Cai, 2019).

Second, because more than 80% of SFCU graduates from developed areas and affluent families engage in further studies, there is a potential risk of exacerbating overeducation and employment competition. The problem of overeducation has

emerged across the world, coupled with a trend toward mismatches in which graduates with higher university degrees are forced to choose jobs requiring less education (Figueiredo et al., 2015; Wronowska, 2017). According to data published by the Office for National Statistics in 2019, nearly 31% of graduates were overeducated for their current job (Office for National Statistics, 2019). In this regard, postgraduate study has been regarded as an attractive way to defer employment pressure (Nesvisky, 2012). However, the reality is that these graduates may confront more severe employment competition when they flood into the labor market after completing their further studies than when they obtained their first degrees due to the devaluation of qualifications and the explosion of jobseekers.

The lower rate of engagement in entrepreneurship partly implies that SFCU graduates lack a strong passion and willingness to engage in challenging and creative jobs. This also manifests educational waste, in that their SFCU education gives them applied professional and entrepreneurial knowledge but declined enthusiasm in the labor market (Fengliang & Liang, 2019). This waste can also be evidenced by the fact that most of them worked for institutional organizations or even governments with stereotyped work traditions.

Finally, given that some graduates from less-known SFCUs are falling into the unemployment dilemma, it will take a long time for SFCUs, especially for Chinese cooperative universities, to improve their reputations, realize their value (Lu, 2018), help graduates receive more respect, lower employment barriers for graduates, and become embedded into the mainstream of Chinese higher education systems. Currently, China's strategy for internationalization has transformed from the one-way import of foreign educational resources to an emphasis on the leading role of Chinese scholars and the reputation of international partners (R. Yang, 2014). Therefore, effective measures should be taken to promote the prestige of SFCUs and improve students' employability, including career education, interview training, and work-related internships (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017).

Conclusion

This study explored the employment prospects of graduates from SFCUs by employing a case study method based on documents released by universities. The findings revealed that graduates who studied at intercultural universities had distinct advantages in further study and direct employment, especially in receiving offers from elite overseas universities, compared with their peers. These advantages can be attributed to SFCU graduates' high competitiveness with respect to learning capabilities, professional knowledge, English proficiency, international experience, and family support. Despite the lower entrepreneurship rate, the unemployment dilemma for those attending less-known SFCUs, and concerns about brain drain, economic flow, overeducation, and delayed employment competition, the results suggest a significant role for SFCUs in promoting cultural integration between the West and China (R. Yang, 2014), reinforcing connections with international higher education institutes, and propelling the reform of the Chinese higher education system.

Limitations and Further Research

Although this study extends understanding of the employment outcome of graduates from SFCUs, limitations remain. The first limitation is that the case universities were limited to six SFCUs that had current graduates. Further work should incorporate the remaining three SFCUs into the research agenda to facilitate the reliability and generalizability of the results. The second potential limitation is that the analysis did not address the interlinkage between pedagogy and employability because of its emphasis on the “outputs” of SFCUs. Further research should comprehensively explore the achieved factors, such as individual effort and university teaching (Chan, 2014; Stenstrom et al., 2013), which affect the employment outcomes of graduates from these nontraditional Chinese mixed-culture universities.


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