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# What Changes Occurred in Transnational Degree Programs in Chinese Universities from 2003 to 2023?

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# Outline

- Introduction
- Data analysis & discussion
- Concluding remarks

- In China, the phrase that is equivalent to, or used almost in the same sense as transnational higher education (TNHE) is *Zhongwai Hezuo Banxue* in Chinese. It means Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools, or the joint operation of higher education institutions and collaborative delivery of educational programs with foreign partners and universities of Hong Kong and Macao.

*“Those foreign corporate, individuals, and related international organizations in cooperation with educational institutions or other social organizations with corporate status in China, jointly establish education institutions in China, recruit Chinese citizen as major educational objectives, and undertake education and teaching activities” (Chapter 1, Provision 2, MOE, 1995).*

- According to Lin (2022), TNHE institutions and programs account for about 90% of the total transnational institutions and programs, including secondary and other forms of institutions and programs.
- The number of enrolled students is about 600,000, and the number of graduates exceeds 2 million.
- The quality of TNHE has also been greatly improved as more leading foreign universities have collaborated with Chinese institutions and more domestic students with high quality have been admitted to these institutions and programs.

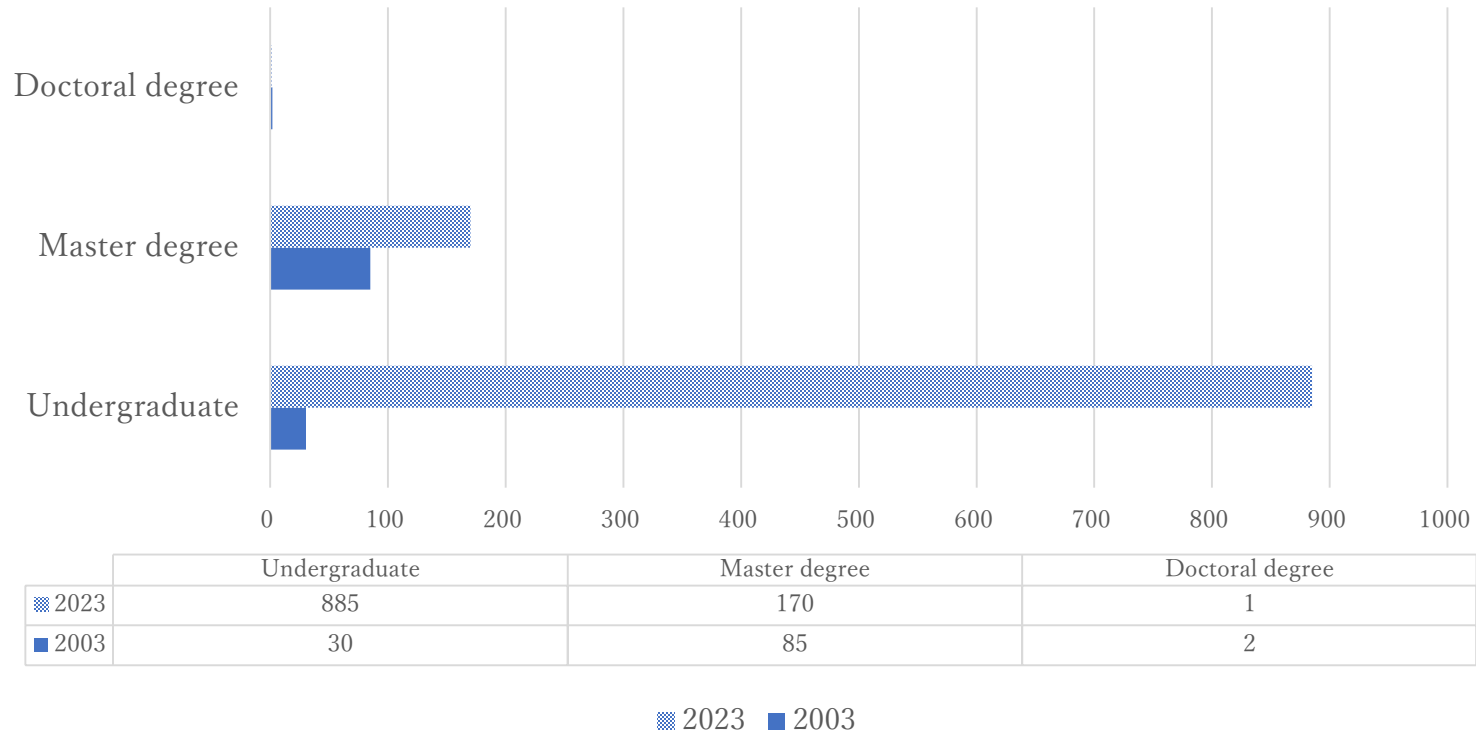
- There has been a growing body of research on TNHE in China in recent years. However, there has been less research on changes in TNHE degree programs since China joined the WTO in 2002, based on time-series statistics.
- TNHE degree programs are essential for institutions to offer high-quality education that prepares students for successful careers and contributes to the overall growth and development of society. *Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze and discuss changes in the provision of TNHE degree programs by Chinese universities from 2003 to 2023, focusing on changes related to the level of educational programs offered, partner countries involved, disciplines covered, and location of Chinese universities providing these programs, as well as other aspects of TNHE degree programs.*
- Using national statistics of TNHE programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels issued by the Ministry of Education, China in 2003 and 2023, this study aims to examine whether there were any changes in these programs over the period, and the implications for policymakers, educators, and students alike.

- The study creates two broad research questions:
  1. *what changes occurred in the provision of TNHE degree programs from 2003 to 2023 in Chinese universities*
  2. *what factors affected these changes ?*
- The main analytical methods include descriptive statistics on TNHE programs in China that were issued by the Chinese government in 2003 and 2023 in the Information Platform for Supervision of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Schools in March 2003 and February 2023 respectively.

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**Figure 1 Changes in the number of degree programs by educational level**



According to data presented in Figure 1, the largest number of degree programs in TNHE belonged to the Master's degree level (85), followed by those at the undergraduate level (30), and 2 doctoral programs in 2003. In contrast, in 2023, undergraduate programs represented the majority of TNHE degree programs (885), followed by Master's degree programs (170), and 1 doctoral program in 2023. Further, the data reveals that the number of undergraduate programs had the biggest increase from 30 in 2003 to 885 in 2023. In contrast, the number of doctoral degree programs decreased from 2 in 2003 to 1 in 2023. The number of master's programs has also shown a more significant increase, from around 85 in 2003 to 170 in 2023.



**Table 1 Changes in the number of TNHE programs by overseas partner country and system**

Overseas Partner	2003	2023
The USA	37	309
Australia	28	107
Hong Kong, SAR	16	17
France	8	47
Canada	6	61
The UK	5	218
Norway	2	2
Singapore	2	9
The Netherlands	2	28
Belgium	2	2
Germany	1	61
Korea	2	86
Russia	0	109
Japan	0	15
Total		1071

Table 1 shows changes in the number of TNHE degree programs by overseas partner country and system between 2003 and 2023. The data reveals that the USA was the largest overseas partner in terms of the number of TNHE programs, with 37 programs in 2003 and a significant increase to 309 programs in 2023. The UK had also seen a substantial increase in the number of TNHE programs, from 5 in 2003 to 218 in 2023.

Australia was the second-largest partner in 2003, with 28 TNHE programs, but this decreased to 107 in 2023. Canada, on the other hand, had seen an increase in the number of TNHE degree programs, from 6 in 2003 to 61 in 2023. France had also seen a substantial increase in the number of TNHE programs, from 8 in 2003 to 47 in 2023. Germany had only one TNHE program in 2003, but this had increased to 61 by 2023. Korea had also seen a significant increase, from 2 TNHE programs in 2003 to 86 in 2023.

In terms of other partner countries, Hong Kong, SAR, Singapore, the Netherlands, and Belgium had seen only small changes in the number of TNHE programs. Norway had only two TNHE programs in both 2003 and 2023. Russia and Japan did not have any TNHE programs in 2003, but have since established a considerable number of programs. Russia had 109 TNHE programs by 2023, while Japan had 15 programs.

**Table 2 Changes in the number of TNHE programs by discipline**

Discipline	2003	2023
Management	69	96
Economics	15	68
Engineering	14	116
Literature	6	56
Law	5	8
Education	4	15
Science	2	191
Medical Science	2	13
Other	0	493
Total	117	1056

Based on the information provided in Table 2, it appears that there was a significant shift in the proportion of TNHE degree programs offered over the past 20 years. In 2003, the largest proportion of degree programs related to Management (69), followed by Economics (15) and Engineering (14).

However, in 2003, except for Other (493), the largest proportion of degree programs was in the Science (191), followed by Engineering (116) and Management (96).

The data suggests that this shift may reflect a transition in the delivery of TNHE degree programs, from a focus on job-ready knowledge and skills in commerce and trade, to more basic fields of Science and Engineering. This may be indicative of a broader trend towards a greater emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and training.

**Table 3 Changes in the number of TNHE degree programs in terms of province and city in China**

Province or City	2003	2023
Beijing	27	60
Shanghai	25	35
Tianjin	10	19
Chongqing	0	32
Zhejiang	10	67
Guangdong	6	29
Jiangsu	5	97
Jiangxi	5	26
Liaoning	4	42
Hainan	0	10
Fujian	0	28
Shandong	0	93
Sichuan	0	24
Anhui	0	25
Hebei	0	46
Henan	0	107
Hubei	0	69
Hunan	0	39
Shangxi	0	26
Shanxi	0	3
Hilongjiang	0	27
Jilin	0	65
Guangxi	0	23
Yunan	0	18
Guizhou	0	14
Gansu	0	4
Neimenggu	0	9
Ningxia	0	3
Xinjiang	0	2
Qinghai	0	1
Total		1043

Table 3 provides information on the changes in the number of TNHE degree programs in various provinces and cities in China between 2003 and 2023. In 2003, Beijing had the highest number of TNHE degree programs (27). By 2023, the number of TNHE degree programs in Beijing had increased to 60, while the number in Shanghai had only increased slightly to 35. Tianjin also saw an increase in the number of TNHE degree programs, from 10 in 2003 to 19 in 2023.

The largest increase in the number of TNHE degree programs occurred in Chongqing, which did not have any TNHE degree programs in 2003, but had 32 programs by 2023. Zhejiang also saw a significant increase, from 10 TNHE degree programs in 2003 to 67 in 2023.

In terms of other provinces and cities, Guangdong had only a small increase in the number of TNHE degree programs, from 6 in 2003 to 29 in 2023. Jiangsu had a notable increase, from 5 TNHE degree programs in 2003 to 97 in 2023. Liaoning also saw a significant increase, from 4 TNHE degree programs in 2003 to 42 in 2023.

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Zhejiang	10	67
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Jiangsu	5	97
Jiangxi	5	26
Liaoning	4	42
Hainan	0	10
Fujian	0	28
Shandong	0	93
Sichuan	0	24
Anhui	0	25
Hebei	0	46
Henan	0	107
Hubei	0	69
Hunan	0	39
Shangxi	0	26
Shanxi	0	3
Hilongjiang	0	27
Jilin	0	65
Guangxi	0	23
Yunan	0	18
Guizhou	0	14
Gansu	0	4
Neimenggu	0	9
Ningxia	0	3
Xinjiang	0	2
Qinghai	0	1
Total		1043

Several provinces and cities did not have any TNHE degree programs in 2003, but had a number of programs by 2023, including Chongqing, Hainan, Fujian, Shandong, Sichuan, Anhui, Hebei, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Shangxi, Hilongjiang, Guangxi, Yunan, Guizhou, Gansu, Neimenggu, Ningxia, Xinjiang, and Qinghai.

In short, the data suggests that there has been a significant increase in the number of TNHE degree programs in China over the past decade, with some provinces and cities experiencing larger increases than others. This may reflect a growing demand for international education opportunities in China, as well as efforts by Chinese institutions and especially local authorities to establish partnerships with foreign universities and increase their global presence.

In terms of global ranking of Chinese universities that collaborated with foreign universities, previous research indicates that in the 1990s and early 2000s, the majority of leading Chinese universities were engaged in working with foreign partners to provide TNHE degree programs (Huang, 2003; pp 202-203).

However, in 2023, Shanghai Normal University had the largest number of TNHE degree programs with foreign partners (13), followed by Tsinghua University (12), and Henan University of Science and Technology (9).

In comparison to the past decade, it appears that a greater number of less prestigious or local universities become involved in providing TNHE degree programs in collaboration with foreign countries.

It is worth noting that, in contrast to 2003 when no private universities were qualified to award degree programs in collaboration with foreign universities, in 2023, several private universities offer TNHE degree programs. For example, Shanghai Sanda University and the United States Redlands University cooperate to launch an undergraduate education program in international economics and trade. Tianhua College of Shanghai Normal University cooperates with Western Oregon University in the United States to offer an undergraduate program in preschool education. Guangzhou South China University of Technology and Ireland's Griffith College jointly offer an undergraduate program in Data Science and Big Data Technology.

However, it should be noted that, almost all of these programs are undergraduate program that only offer bachelor's degrees (Ministry of Education, 2023).

From the perspective of foreign partners, compared to 2003 when a majority of them belonged to non-research-intensive universities or had less prestige in the world, it appears that a greater number of foreign partners with relatively higher rankings in global university tables like QS and Times HE, have collaborated with Chinese universities to provide degree programs.

Among them, New York State University in the USA, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Australia, and University of Greenwich and Manchester in the UK provided a large number of degree programs in China (Ministry of Education, 2023).

**Table 4 Number of TNHE degree & non-degree programs in collaboration with Russian universities by educational level & discipline**

Educational level	undergraduate	95
	master degree	5
	doctoral degree	
Discipline	Management	2
	Economics	1
	Engineering	12
	Literature	0
	Law	0
	Education	1
	Science	4
	Medical Science	0
	Degree only awarded by Russian universities	11
	Only certificate and diploma	4
Degree & certificate	No degree awarded by Russian universities	65
	Total	100

**Table 5 Number of TNHE degree & non-degree programs in collaboration with Russian universities by region & city**

Region & city	Beijing	1
	Shanghai	2
	Chongqing	1
	Zhejiang	1
	Jiangsu	7
	Jiangxi	4
	Liaoning	8
	Hainan	1
	Shandong	5
	Hebei	2
	Henan	9
	Hunan	1
	Shangxi	1
	Shanxi	1
	Hilongjiang	38
	Jilin	14
Yunan	1	
Neimenggu	1	
Xinjiang	2	
Total	100	



The changes in the number and type of TNHE degree programs in China between 2003 and 2023 can be explained by several factors.

- The increase in the number of undergraduate programs may reflect China's efforts to increase the number of highly skilled workers and meet the growing demand for higher education among Chinese students. This trend may also be a result of the government's policy to expand higher education opportunities, particularly at the undergraduate level.
- The significant increase in the number of TNHE programs from the USA and the UK may reflect the growing demand for international education opportunities among Chinese students, as well as the efforts of these countries to increase their global presence and expand their education markets.
- The shift in the proportion of TNHE degree programs from Management to Science and Engineering fields may reflect a broader trend towards a greater emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and training, which is in line with the needs of China's growing economy and increasing technological development.

- The changes in the number of TNHE degree programs in different provinces and cities in China may reflect regional differences in the demand for higher education and the availability of educational resources. For example, the significant increase in the number of TNHE degree programs in Chongqing and Zhejiang may be a result of the government's efforts to promote economic development and higher education in these regions.

In summary, the changes in the number and type of TNHE degree programs in China between 2003 and 2023 are likely to be influenced by a combination of government policies, economic development, and changing demands and preferences of students and institutions for international education opportunities.

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The data presented in the study suggests that the TNHE landscape in China has undergone significant changes from 2003 to 2023.

1. The growth of TNHE degree programs, particularly at the undergraduate level, indicates a strong demand for higher education among Chinese students.
2. The USA and UK have been the dominant partners in terms of the number of TNHE degree programs, but other countries have also seen increases in partnership with Chinese institutions.
3. The shift towards more basic fields of Science and Engineering in TNHE degree programs may reflect a broader trend towards STEM education and training in China.
4. Additionally, the changes in the distribution of TNHE degree programs across provinces and cities in China suggest that the growth of TNHE is not uniform throughout the country, with some areas experiencing more significant increases than others.

In short, these trends highlight the importance of TNHE in China's higher education landscape and its role in meeting the evolving needs of Chinese students and society.

Compared to the previous literature, the study highlights several key trends in the growth and diversification of TNHE degree programs in China from 2003 to 2023.

1. there has been rapid growth in the number of TNHE degree programs, as well as increasing diversity in terms of institutions, disciplines, educational levels, partner countries, and geographic origins.
2. more non-research-intensive Chinese universities in local areas have become engaged in offering TNHE degree programs.
3. Chinese universities have formed partnerships with a wider range of foreign universities, including those from non-traditional source countries such as Russia and Japan.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the trend towards online TNHE programs, as Chinese universities have expanded their offerings of such programs to local students who were recruited by foreign universities but were unable to travel due to international travel restrictions.

It is worth emphasizing that some of the findings drawn from this study align with previous research. For instance, the study conducted by Hou et al. (2014) established that no significant changes have been confirmed in the foreign partner countries that Chinese universities collaborate with, as well as the popular disciplines they provide, during the last 20 years.

Furthermore, despite the many uncertainties highlighted by Wilkins (2016), it is evident that some trends in the development of TNHE degree programs in China in a limited period are clear.

However, the study does not support early analyses that argued that, the vast majority of these TNHE degree programs were provided in China's most prestigious or leading universities, which are mostly located in big cities, particularly in Beijing and Shanghai (Huang, 2006, p. 26).

Thank you for your attention