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Chapter: A Comprehensive Analysis of Leadership Skills and Navigating Employment Trends

MANAGEMENT OF TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION UNDER THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: GROWTH SCALE, REGIONAL COOPERATION AND MAJOR CATEGORY LAYOUT

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Annotation. International education exchanges and cooperations are important aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This paper examines the transnational higher education programmes and institutions that China has established in collaboration with the BRI co-construction countries over the past decade. This study presents empirical research on the scale of growth, regional education locations, co-construction countries, as well as characteristics of discipline categories and major categories. The data is analysed using the paired samples Wilcoxon signed-rank test and the chi-square test. The results show a significant increase in the number of international cooperative programmes and institutions. However, the expansion of transnational higher education within the BRI framework demonstrates a trend towards aggregation, with concentration in specific Chinese domestic provinces and cooperation countries, as well as in certain disciplinary fields. At the junior college level, there is a more prominent development in certain major categories, while the trend for undergraduate education is to broaden the scope of international education cooperation. To promote transnational cooperation in higher education, it is important to consider the regional advantages, the urgent needs of both university partners, job market needs, and industry development. This approach represents the future development direction for international education cooperation.

Keywords: transnational higher education management, BRI, structuring of major categories, regional cooperation, junior and undergraduate college education.

JEL classification: C80, I23, I28.

Introduction

China-related transnational education can be broadly classified into two categories. The term ‘offshore transnational education’ refers to campus education delivered by China as the host in an overseas location. This paper, however, focuses on the other category, namely the Sino-foreign cooperation in education conducting. The primary enrolment targets for Sino-foreign cooperative education are Chinese citizens, and the education is conducted within China. At present, the development focus of Sino-foreign cooperation education has shifted from increasing quantity to improving quality.

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This paper examines the Sino-foreign cooperation education within the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), focusing on both modes, namely programmes and institutions. Positioned as a strategic mechanism within the BRI framework, the Sino-foreign cooperation education directly supports the initiative's core goals to promote in-depth education exchanges and cooperation, establish higher education cooperation mechanisms, and share education resources between China and other countries.

Previous studies that employ a quantitative methodology to examine Sino-foreign education cooperation have tended to analyse its development over time, using a specific year as a demarcation point. When conducting research, scholars typically either do not impose any regional limitations or restrict their studies to a specific set of Chinese provinces where the education cooperation is taking place or to a select group of cooperation countries. This paper commences its investigation at the point of each country's accession to the BRI, with a particular focus on the Chinese provinces and cooperation countries engaged in this initiative. This study explores the development of Sino-foreign education cooperation with the relevant BRI co-construction countries over the past ten years since the proposal of the BRI. It considers changes in the scale of education, the distribution of education venues, the international layout of education partners, and the structure of discipline categories and major categories. Furthermore, this research deals with the education cooperation at both the junior and undergraduate college levels and presents a comparative analysis that is not commonly found in previous studies.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Transnational Higher Education

Transnational education (TNE) refers to an educational programme delivered by a foreign provider to a domestic university (McNamara, Knight, 2015; Bauk, 2019). However, the term's usage is inconsistent. For example, Australia does not include any form of online learning as part of TNE data, while joint degrees are not considered TNE in Germany (Knight, McNamara, 2017; Yencken *et al.*, 2021). In the field of higher education, 'internationalisation' is a commonly used concept in addition to TNE. Internationalisation emphasises the process of integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into higher education, as well as integrating institution staff and students into the globalised world (Knight, 1994; Hawawini, 2012). Based on the interpretation of internationalisation of higher education mentioned above, its scope is broad, and Sino-foreign cooperation in higher education can be considered as a specific pathway to achieve and implement the internationalisation of higher education. To maintain simplicity in terminology, the term 'Chinese Transnational Higher Education (Sino-TNHE)' instead of 'Sino-foreign cooperation in higher education conducting' is used in the following sections.

Research on TNHE covers a wide range of topics, including the analysis of objective content such as documentation, curriculum, teaching staff, student enrolment, as well as interpretations of subjective perceptions of those involved in TNHE. Faculty and student surveys are commonly employed as means of gathering feedback. For instance, Straughair *et al.* (2023) examined the perceptions of educators regarding their experiences of transnational education in nursing. Similarly, Arunasalam and Burton (2018) investigated the TNHE classroom experiences of nurses from the perspective of the learners. Menon and Clyne (2022) discussed how students interpret formative feedback provided by teachers and transform it into action. Some studies limit their research geographic scope to 'education cities', also known as the 'education hubs'. These are physical locations of international universities that function as nodes in transnational networks of universities (Knight, 2011, 2018). For instance, Rashad *et al.* (2020) discussed Malaysia's strength as a regional education hub, and Kleibert *et al.* (2021) analysed the

phenomenon of transnational education zones, using Doha, Dubai, Iskandar, and Flic en Flac as case studies.

In terms of Sino-TNHE, there is a significant number of research devoted to it. A search for Sino-TNHE as the subject term on CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) yields over 6,000 related articles. Frequently occurring topics in these articles include English teaching, bilingual teaching, talent cultivation, teaching management, as well as student management. Gong *et al*. (2022) analysed the development trend of Sino-TNHE using data from CNKI. They identified three research hotspots: teaching-related research (including strategies for improving teaching quality), talent cultivation, and curriculum system.

While some scholars believe that Sino-TNHE has made significant progress regarding scale development and quality improvement, others raised concerns about its current status. For instance, teaching-team building in Sino-TNHE is not considered effective and the mechanism for sustainable development is not functioning well. One perspective argues that the Sino-TNHE has a limited and marginal impact on the local higher education of host universities. Therefore, it is recommended that Sino-TNHE establish its own brand instead of relying on the brand effect of the partner universities (Ding, 2019).

1.2 International Cooperation in Education under the BRI

The study of the BRI primarily focuses on its economic dimension, including trade, investment, energy, natural resources, infrastructure building, carbon emission reduction, and environmental sustainability. Yet some literature explored the BRI's cultural values and philosophical roots from the cultural study perspective (Peters, 2022; Edeh, Zhao, 2022). In other literature, bibliometric reviews of published literature on the BRI were conducted. These articles analysed the research institutions, the journal distribution, the high-yielding authors, as well as the research topic preferences across different cohorts, regions and countries (Bashir *et al.*, 2021; Khanal, Zhang, 2023). Additionally, there are also scholars who focused on the BRI's implementation in specific regions. For instance, Nguembi *et al.* (2021) discussed the benefits of the BRI for sub-Saharan African countries. Xiao *et al.* (2018) compared different spatial regions to identify imbalances in individual country developments along the BRI road. They found that countries in Central and Eastern Europe have the highest levels of development, while those in South Asia have relatively low levels.

Regarding the effectiveness of the BRI in education, some argue that it has helped to shift imbalances in global talent and research funding flows and improved the role of Chinese universities in nation branding (Yan *et al.*, 2019). The education cooperation mechanism within the framework of the BRI has facilitated closer and more targeted education cooperation between China and other countries. Research has also been conducted on bibliometric analysis of higher education, the internationalisation of Chinese higher education, the offshore transnational education, the development and challenges of Sino-TNHE, as well as on the foreign language education and the education of overseas students (*e.g.* Li, Zhang, 2020; Ma, 2021; Wu, 2022). According to Peters (2020), the BRI has had a significant impact on global higher education, particularly on educating international students. It is worth noting that the literature on international student education is quite comprehensive, covering the entire process from students' enrolment to their employment. The related topics are as follows: attracting and recruiting international students, student management strategies, teaching methods, sociocultural adaptation of the international students, academic performance of the international students, as well as their career development (*e.g.* Akhtar *et al.*, 2019; Peng, Hu, 2020; Huang *et al.*, 2021; Sun *et al.*, 2023; Li *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, there are also some studies on the theme of education in the context of the BRI, which have been carried out on the basis of geographic regions. These regional studies demonstrate three typical research perspectives. Research under the first perspective examined the cooperative partnerships between universities within the framework of the BRI. For instance, Chou and Demiryol (2023) demonstrated the operation modes of knowledge diplomacy and knowledge power in the University Alliance of the Silk Road and the Asian Universities Alliance, respectively. From the second perspective, the focus is on highlighting China's cooperation with a specific country in organising Sino-TNHE. For example, Duisekina and Ashinova (2020) outlined the advances made in the bilateral educational collaboration between Kazakhstan and China and emphasised the necessity for harmonisation of educational standards. Liang (2018) analysed the positive results and remaining problems in the current Sino-Russian-TNHE. Countermeasures were proposed, including the introduction of high-quality education resources, as well as the establishment and improvement of sound evaluation systems and mechanisms. Under the third perspective, the analysis attached more importance to the development of Sino-TNHE in one of the Chinese provinces. For instance, Tang and Li (2021) and Yue (2020) conducted an investigation into the development status and optimisation path of Sino-TNHE in Jiangsu and Shaanxi Province, respectively.

2. Statistical Analysis

The information on Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions used in this paper is taken from the information network designed to regulate international education and published by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. As of December 2023, the network's data has been consulted to inquire about the educational cooperation between China and the BRI co-construction countries. The results indicate that 12 BRI co-construction countries are engaged in TNHE cooperation with China at the junior college education level, while 17 countries have established partnerships in education cooperation with China at the undergraduate college level. Among them, 10 countries collaborate with China at both junior college and undergraduate college levels. The paired samples Wilcoxon signed-rank test is used to analyse the data for statistically significant differences, while the chi-square test is used to check for correlations between variables.

2.1 Growth Scale of Sino-TNHE since the Launch of the BRI

Countries that cooperated with China in TNHE programmes or institutions before the year of 2010 are considered to have an early start in education cooperation with China. Meanwhile, countries that began cooperating with China in TNHE after 2010 but before joining the BRI are classified as having an intermediate start in education cooperation with China. Countries that achieved a breakthrough from zero in TNHE with China after joining the BRI are labelled as having a 'late start' in education cooperation with China. From a different perspective, the BRI co-construction countries can also be divided into three categories according to the year in which they joined the initiative: 'early (2014-2015)', 'recent (2017-2018)', and 'last 5 years (since 2019)'. *Table 1* presented below summarises these classifications.

In *Table 1*, countries that have experienced a significant increase in the number of TNHE with China after joining the BRI are marked with an upward arrow symbol (↑). For instance, Malaysia has been collaborating with China at the junior college education level since 2007, and joined the BRI in 2017. From 2007 to 2016, Malaysia established 10 TNHE programmes at the junior college level with China, while in the following seven years, namely from 2017 to 2023, an additional 20 TNHE programmes and one institution at the junior college level were added to the cooperation list between China and Malaysia.

Thus, the expansion of Sino-Malaysia-TNHE has accelerated since Malaysia joined the BRI. This is why Malaysia (at the junior college level) is marked with an upward arrow in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Development of Sino-TNHE at Both Junior and Undergraduate College Education Levels in Collaboration with the BRI Co-construction Countries

	Country that is an early adopter of education cooperation with China	**Country that has made an intermediate start in education cooperation with China**	**Country with a late start in education cooperation with China**
Country that joined the BRI early	Russia (JR↑*, UGRD↑*) South Korea (JR↑*, UGRD↑*) Poland (UGRD↑)	Belarus (JR↓, UGRD↑) Poland (JR↓) Ukraine (JR↓, UGRD↑)	Hungary (JR, UGRD)
Country that joined the BRI in the recent 6–7 years	Malaysia (JR↑) Singapore (JR↓) New Zeeland (JR, UGRD↑) Austria (JR↓*, UGRD↑)	Thailand (JR↑)	Malaysia (UGRD) Thailand (UGRD) UAE (UGRD) Bulgaria (UGRD) Lithuania (UGRD) Portugal (UGRD) Greece (UGRD)
Country that joined the BRI in the last 5 years	Italy (UGRD↑)	Italy (JR↑)	Cyprus (UGRD)

Notes: JR – at the junior college education level, UGRD – at the undergraduate college education level.

Source: created by the author (based on the information network's data from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2023).

Countries that have experienced a decrease in growth in TNHE programmes and institutions after joining the BRI are marked with a downward arrow (↓) in *Table 1*. The asterisk indicates countries whose growth in the Sino-TNHE significantly differs from that of other countries since joining the BRI. For instance, China has a strong foundation for TNHE in collaboration with Russia and South Korea. Since these two countries joined the BRI, there has been a substantial increase in Sino-Russian-TNHE and Sino-Korean-TNHE. The numbers of newly established programmes and institutions at both junior and undergraduate college levels in the two countries are much larger compared to other countries. At the junior college level, China has established 161 TNHE programmes and 10 institutions with Russia and South Korea after they joined the BRI in succession. This increase accounts respectively for 67.93% (161/237) and 71.43% (10/14) of the total increase in all the BRI co-construction countries. At the undergraduate college level, 96 Sino-TNHE programmes and 23 institutions with Russia and South Korea have been approved since their inclusion in the BRI. These numbers respectively represent 51.89% (96/185) and 51.11% (23/45) of the total increase. In contrast, the asterisk next to Austria indicates that no Chinese-Austrian-TNHE programmes or institutions at the junior college level have been established since Austria became a member of the BRI.

Table 1 shows that the countries that implemented Sino-TNHE earlier and joined the BRI earlier have experienced a rapid increase in the number of their Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions since they joined the BRI. Overall, during the BRI period, the growth of Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions has been accelerated with all the BRI co-construction countries at the undergraduate college education level. Sino-TNHE has achieved a breakthrough in undergraduate education with nine countries, while only one country has achieved a breakthrough at the junior college level. This suggests that the attempt of an

establishment of the international education partnership at the undergraduate college level is ahead of that at the junior college level. Moreover, the phenomenon of slowing down or no growth of Sino-TNHE during the BRI period exists only at the junior college level. It is worth noting that after joining the BRI, the same country may have different development trends at the junior and undergraduate college levels. For example, the number of TNHE programmes and institutions at the undergraduate college level has significantly increased in Belarus, Poland, and Ukraine, while the growth at the junior college level has slowed down.

Since the co-construction countries joined the BRI, the growth trend in the number of Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions has varied from year to year. *Table 2* displays the years with the highest growth of Sino-TNHE at both junior and undergraduate college levels with the BRI co-construction countries.

Table 2. Increment Peak in the Number of Sino-TNHE Programmes and Institutions at Both Junior and Undergraduate College Education Levels with the BRI Co-construction Countries

		Country in which the total number of newly established Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions peaked in a given year	
		JR	**UGRD**
Year	2015	Poland	
	2017	New Zeeland	
	2018	Ukraine	UAE, Poland
	2020	Hungary	Austria, Bulgaria
	2021	South Korea, Hungary	South Korea, Thailand, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Lithuania, Hungary
	2022	Thailand, Russia, Poland, Belarus	Malaysia, Cyprus, Russia, Greece, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Portugal, Italy
	2023	Singapore, Malaysia, Hungary, Italy	Greece, New Zeeland

Notes: JR – at the junior college education level, UGRD – at the undergraduate college education level.

Source: created by the author (based on the information network's data from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2023).

Table 2 reveals that the number of the Sino-TNHE increments concerning one co-cooperation country at a certain education level may be distributed over multiple years. For instance, the number of the new Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions run with Poland at the undergraduate college level peaked in 2018, 2021, and 2022. In general, the number of Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions at the junior college level showed the greatest increase in 2022 and 2023, while at the undergraduate college level, the year 2022 saw the highest number of new Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions established.

Based on the number of Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions at the junior and undergraduate college levels since the aforementioned countries joined the BRI, four sets of paired data can be generated: first, the number of Sino-TNHE programmes established respectively at the junior and undergraduate college levels in collaboration with the same country since it joined the BRI; second, the number of established Sino-TNHE institutions respectively at the junior and undergraduate college levels in cooperation with the same country since it joined the BRI; third, the number of established Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions at the junior college level with the same country since it joined the BRI; and fourth, the number of Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions at the undergraduate college level established in cooperation with the same country since it joined the BRI. On the four sets of data, four paired samples

Wilcoxon signed-rank tests are conducted. The results indicate that the incremental increase of Sino-TNHE programmes is significantly greater than that of institutions at both junior and undergraduate college levels. Furthermore, the incremental increase number of institutions at the undergraduate college level is significantly larger than that at the junior college level. There is no significant difference in the incremental increase of programmes offered at the junior college level compared to that at the undergraduate college level. This suggests that the development scale of programmes is larger than that of institutions overall. When specifically considering the development scale of institutions, the status at the undergraduate college level is better than at the junior college level.

Table 3. Effective Continuity of Sino-TNHE in Collaboration with the BRI Co-construction Countries at Both Junior and Undergraduate College Education Levels

	Number of programmes		Number of institutions	
	Total established since the cooperation countries joined the BRI	Still in enrolment validity as of 2023	Total established since the cooperation countries joined the BRI	Still in enrolment validity as of 2023
JR	237	195	14	14
UGRD	185	178	45	45

Notes: JR – at the junior college education level, UGRD – at the undergraduate college education level.

Source: created by the author (based on the information network's data from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2023).

The quality of education delivery is reflected, to a certain extent, in the effective continuity of the educational cooperation. High level of educational continuity suggests that the quality of education is responsive to the development needs of both collaborating universities and the actual needs of society over an extended period. This is usually associated with positive factors such as strong scientificity in educational concepts and management. As shown in *Table 3* above, it can be observed that since the cooperation countries joined the BRI, as of 2023, 96.22% (178/185) of the established Sino-TNHE programmes at the undergraduate college level still enrol students. In contrast, the continuation ratio of programmes at the junior college level is 82.28% (195/237). Furthermore, institutions exhibit stronger continuity, with all 14 junior college institutions and 45 undergraduate college institutions remaining active in 2023. This leads to the conclusion that, within the BRI framework, the Sino-TNHE programmes are more effective at the undergraduate college level than at the junior college level. Additionally, institutions have a higher education continuity than programmes.

2.2 Regional Distribution of Sino-TNHE since the Launch of the BRI

Table 4 below shows the regional distribution of the newly established Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions since the cooperation countries joined the BRI.At the junior college level, the Chinese regions conducting the Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions include East, North, Central, Northeast, Southwest, South and Northwest, which ranked in descending order of the Sino-TNHE increase number. In comparison, the undergraduate education regions where Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions are implemented are listed in descending order of growth as follows: Northeast, East, Central, North, Southwest, Northwest and South. Overall, the growth of Sino-TNHE decreases in the sequences of East-Central-West, which is consistent with other scholars' conclusions. This indicates that more Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions are located in the East, making this region more developed in terms of Sino-TNHE (Jing, Chen, 2022). At both the junior and undergraduate college levels, Sino-TNHE's growth in East

China surpasses that of all other Chinese regions, while the growth in the Northwest and South is relatively low. It is worth noting that the geographic structure of Sino-TNHE's growth at the junior college level is slightly more complex, exhibiting a decreasing spatial hierarchy of East Coast – Central – Northeast and Southwest – South – Northwest sequences. Furthermore, the distribution of the growth at the junior college level is more uneven than that at the undergraduate college level: East China has experienced the largest increase in the number of junior college Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions, with a total of 119. This is 3.4 times the number in North China, which ranks second in terms of the increase. Northwest China has the smallest increase, with only three new institutions. This is significantly lower than the number in the East, Central, Southwest, or other Chinese regions.

Table 4. Regional Distribution of the Established Sino-TNHE Programmes and Institutions at Both Junior and Undergraduate College Education Levels since the Cooperation Countries Joined the BRI

		JR				UGRD			
		Programme		Institution		Programme		Institution	
Chinese region	Chinese province	Number	PCT (%)	Number	PCT (%)	Number	PCT (%)	Number	PCT (%)
North	Hebei	30	12.66						
	Total	34	14.35	1	7.14	18	9.73	2	4.44
Northeast	Liaoning							6	13.33
	Jilin					25	13.51		
	Total	25	10.55	1	7.14	48	25.95	9	20.00
East	Shandong	61	25.74					5	11.11
	Total	117	49.37	2	14.29	38	20.54	17	37.78
Central	Henan			3	21.43	37	20.00	8	17.78
	Total	28	11.81	3	21.43	47	25.41	8	17.78
South	Total	11	4.64	1	7.14	10	5.41	2	4.44
Southwest	Total	22	9.28	3	21.43	13	7.03	0	0.00
Northwest	Shaanxi			3	21.43				
	Total	0	0	3	21.43	9	4.86	4	8.89

Notes: JR – at the junior college education level, UGRD – at the undergraduate college education level.

Source: created by the author (based on the information network's data from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2023).

Table 4 also lists the provinces that hold more than 10% of the total increase in all regions, along with the corresponding numerical value of growth. For instance, within the context of the BRI and in collaboration with partner countries, universities in Shandong province have established 61 Sino-TNHE programmes at the junior college level, representing 25.74% of the total increase in all Chinese regions.

The study then examines the association between the provinces hosting Sino-TNHE and the countries where the partner universities are located, using 'provinces where Sino-TNHE programmes or institutions are located' and 'the BRI co-construction countries where the partner universities are located' as categorical variables. According to the domains of 'a certain province' and 'other provinces', as well as 'a certain BRI co-construction country' and 'the other BRI co-construction countries', the corresponding sample frequencies are calculated, and multiple contingency tables are generated. Following the chi-square test, several 'cooperation country – Chinese province' pairs with significant associations are identified, as illustrated in *Table 5*.

Table 5. Significant Correlation between the BRI Co-construction Countries and the Provinces where Sino-TNHE Programmes and Institutions Have Been Established

Cooperation country	Chinese province			
	JR		UGRD	
	Programme	Institution	Programme	Institution
South Korea	Shandong		Jilin	
Singapore	Hainan			
Malaysia	Henan			
Russia	Hubei		Liaoning	
Greece			Liaoning	
Belarus	Inner Mongolia		Henan	
Italy	Zhejiang		Shandong	Shaanxi

Notes: JR – at the junior college education level, UGRD – at the undergraduate college education level.

Source: created by the author (based on the information network's data from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2023).

Table 5 shows the correlations between the BRI co-construction countries and Chinese provinces where Sino-TNHE programmes or institutions are located. For instance, when it comes to implementing the Sino-TNHE programmes at the junior college level, Belarus, Italy, South Korea, Malaysia, Russia and Singapore are significantly correlated with the autonomous region of Inner Mongolia and five Chinese provinces of Zhejiang, Shandong, Henan, Hubei and Hainan, respectively, forming six pairs of 'cooperation country – Chinese province'. The same BRI co-construction country could form significant pairs with different Chinese provinces, depending on the education level and the education mode. In terms of the programmes, for instance, at the junior college level, there is a significant correlation between Russia and Hubei province, whereas at the undergraduate college level, the correlation pair of 'Russia – Liaoning province' is significant. The correlations also exist between one Chinese province and different cooperation countries. The connection could be based on education at the same level. For example, the pairs of 'Liaoning province – Russia' and 'Liaoning province – Greece' regarding the undergraduate programmes are formed respectively. Alternatively, connections can also be established at different educational levels. For example, there is a significant partnership between Shandong province and South Korea in terms of the junior college programmes, and another partnership exists between Shandong province and Italy regarding the undergraduate college programmes.

2.3 Discipline and Major Layout of Sino-TNHE since the Launch of the BRI

The majors of the Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions established since the cooperation countries joined the BRI are classified according to 2023 edition of the vocational education major catalogue and the undergraduate higher education major catalogue, which have been published by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. At the junior college level, programmes and institutions are categorised by the general major categories and the specialised major categories. At the undergraduate college level, they are classified by the discipline categories and the major categories. The data shows that Sino-TNHE covers a wide range of majors. At the junior college level, all 19 general major categories are included, comprising 51 specialised major categories. The following list shows the 19 major categories, their corresponding numbers and percentages in descending order: traffic and transportation (53, 18.15%), electronics and information (49, 16.78%), equipment manufacturing (38, 13.01%), finance, economics, business and commerce (35, 11.99%), culture and art (28, 9.59%), medicine and health (24, 8.22%), education and sports (14, 4.79%), civil engineering and construction (13, 4.45%), tourism (11,

3.77%), resources, environment and safety (7, 2.40%), light industry and textile (5, 1.71%), food and medicine (3, 1.03%), agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery (4, 1.37%), news dissemination (2, 0.68%), biology and chemical industry (2, 0.68%), water conservancy (1, 0.34%), energy power and materials (1, 0.34%), public administration and services (1, 0.34%), and public security and justice (1, 0.34%). The undergraduate college level includes 10 discipline categories, containing a total of 56 major categories. The discipline categories are ranked in descending order as follows: engineering (189, 55.59%), arts (59, 17.35%), science (31, 9.12%), management (15, 4.41%), education (12, 3.53%), economics (11, 3.24%), literature (8, 2.35%), medicine (8, 2.35%), agriculture (6, 1.76%), and history (1, 0.29%).

Although Sino-TNHE involves multiple majors, there is a certain degree of concentration in terms of quantity. Studies have demonstrated that finance and commerce related majors have the highest proportion at the junior college level. Additionally, the proportions of equipment manufacturing and electronic information are also relatively high (Kang *et al.*, 2020), which is consistent with the findings of this paper. The presented research in this paper suggests that at the junior college level, the major categories in electronic and information, equipment manufacturing, finance, and commerce rank second, third, and fourth, respectively, in the total number of all major categories, in terms of within the BRI context established Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions. Although business is a popular major category, it does not account for a significantly higher percentage than other major categories. According to Kang *et al.* (2020) and Wu (2022), only a small number of Sino-TNHE major categories are related to the major categories encouraged by China for development with the BRI co-construction countries. These categories include transportation, architecture, medicine, energy, environmental engineering, water conservancy engineering, biological marine science, ecological protection, and cultural heritage protection. However, this paper reveals that transportation is the most prominent major category in Sino-TNHE at the junior college level, with the highest proportion of total major categories. Railway transportation, as the specialised major category, which falls under the transportation category, has experienced significant growth since its inception in 2016. According to previous studies on the undergraduate Sino-TNHE, the top-ranking discipline categories by number include engineering, arts, science, and management, involving the major categories of computer science, mechanical science, electronic information, and design (Li, Chen, 2023). These findings echo those of this paper: at the undergraduate college level, over half of the established majors are concentrated in engineering disciplines since the cooperation countries joined the BRI. The major categories with the highest percentages include mechanics (16.25%), design (13.33%), computer science (9.58%), and electronic information (8.33%). In contrast, there are also major categories with low percentages at both junior and undergraduate college levels. For instance, the field of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery accounts for only 1.37% at the junior college level and 1.76% at the undergraduate college level.

Table 6 and *Table 7* list the important discipline categories and major categories offered in Sino-TNHE at the junior and undergraduate college levels after the cooperation countries joined the BRI. Each of these discipline categories or major categories either accounts for more than 10% of the total number of categories or is widely distributed, meaning they are offered in more than half of the Sino-TNHE cooperation countries.

Table 6. Discipline and Major Distribution of Established Sino-TNHE Programmes and Institutions at the Junior College Education Level since the Cooperation Countries Joined the BRI

Distributional characteristics	General major categories	Specialised major categories	Num-ber	PCT (%)	Countries with strong connection	Number of distributed countries
A relatively large number, but not widely distributed	Traffic and transportation	Total	53	18.15	Russia [Arguments A (39 out of 53), B and C]	4
		Railway transportation	36	12.33	Russia [Arguments A (29 out of 36), B and C]	4
A relatively large number and widely distributed	Electronics and Information	Total	49	16.78	South Korea [Arguments A (22 out of 49) and B]	8
		Computer	42	14.38	South Korea [Arguments A (19 out of 42) and B]	8
	Equipment manufacturing	Total	38	13.01	Russia [Arguments A (21 out of 38) and C]	7
	Finance, economics, business and commerce	Total	35	11.99	Poland, Singapore [Argument C]	8
A relatively small number, but widely distributed		Finance and accounting	14	4.79	Poland, Singapore [Argument C]	7
	Tourism	Total	11	3.77		6
		Tourism	11	3.77		6

Notes: arguments A, B, and C all support the connection between a discipline category or major category and a specific country. Argument A suggests that quite a lot of Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions offering a certain discipline category or major category are conducted with a particular country. Argument B indicates that Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions in terms of a particular country offer a specific discipline category or major category more frequently than any other categories. Argument C demonstrates a significant association between a particular discipline category or major category and a specific country. PCT is percentage.

Source: calculated by the author (based on the information network's data from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2023).

Table 7. Discipline and Major Distribution of Established Sino-TNHE Programmes and Institutions at the Undergraduate College Education Level since the Cooperation Countries Joined the BRI

Distributional characteristics	Discipline categories	Major categories	Num-ber	PCT (%)	Countries with strong connection	Number of distributed countries
A relatively large number and widely distributed	Arts	Total	59	17.35	Italy [Arguments B and C]; Russia [Argument C]	10
		Design	32	13.33	Italy [Arguments B and C]; South Korea [Argument: B]; Russia [Argument C]	9
	Engineering	Total	189	55.59	Russia [Arguments A (89 out of 189), B and C]; Ukraine, Italy [Arguments B and C]	15
A relatively large number and moderately distributed		Mechanics	39	16.25	Russia [Arguments A (21 out of 39), B and C]; Malaysia [Arguments B and C]	8

Notes: arguments A, B, and C all support the connection between a discipline category or major category and a specific country. Argument A suggests that quite a lot of Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions offering a certain discipline category or major category are conducted with a particular country. Argument B indicates that Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions in terms of a particular country offer a specific discipline category or major category more frequently than any other categories. Argument C demonstrates a significant association between a particular discipline category or major category and a specific country. PCT is percentage.

Source: calculated by the author (based on the information network's data from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2023).

As previously stated, 11 countries have implemented new Sino-TNHE programmes or institutions at the junior college level after joining the BRI. According to *Table 6*, transportation is offered by more than 10% of programmes and institutions at the junior college level, but only exists in 4 out of 11 countries, as indicated by the number '4'. A strong correlation exists between traffic and transportation as the general major category and Russia as the cooperation country. Out of the 53 major classifications in the traffic and transportation category, 39 are conducted with Russia. Furthermore, traffic and transportation form the primary general major category with the highest proportion offered in Sino-Russian-TNHE. In addition, the chi-square test indicates a significant association between the general major category of transportation and Russia as the cooperation country of Sino-TNHE. The general major categories of electronics and information, equipment manufacturing, finance, economics, business and commerce all account for a large number and are widely offered. In contrast, the general major category of tourism has a relatively small number of occurrences but is widely distributed. *Table 7* presents the distribution of discipline categories at the undergraduate college level, with engineering and art being the most prominent. The major categories of mechanics and design, which belong to engineering and art respectively, have the highest major category numbers. Engineering is the most prominent discipline category offered by Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions, accounting for 55.59% of all categories. It is widely distributed, being implemented in 15 out of 17 BRI co-construction countries.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Development Scale and Vitality of Sino-TNHE under the BRI

Since the launch of the BRI, there has been a rise in the number of Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions at both junior and undergraduate college levels between China and the participating countries. The scale of programme development is larger than that of institution development overall. At the undergraduate college level, the development scale is generally greater than at the junior college level, as evidenced by the rapid increase in the number of new Sino-TNHE undergraduate programmes and institutions in various countries. In addition, Sino-TNHE at the undergraduate college level has been more continuous and has a longer effective running time. It indicates that the quality of Sino-TNHE at the undergraduate college level is higher than that at the junior college level.

3.2 Spatial Distribution of Sino-TNHE in Domestic Regions under the BRI

The development level of Sino-TNHE is closely linked to the geographic regions. The number of Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions in Chinese regions follows a pattern of 'more in the east and less in the west'. East China, particularly Shandong province, has experienced the most striking increase in Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions. Furthermore, the growth trend of Sino-TNHE in Henan province is also quite prominent. Compared to the regional distribution of Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions at the undergraduate college level, the gap between the incremental numbers in different regions is larger at the junior college level, resulting in non-coordination and imbalanced regional development in terms of Sino-TNHE. However, the development status of Sino-TNHE at the junior college level in some parts of the western region is slightly better than that at the undergraduate college level. This is evidenced by the incremental growth of junior college Sino-TNHE in the Southwest, which is only slightly lower than that of the central region, roughly equivalent to that of the northeastern region, and higher than the growth of undergraduate college Sino-TNHE in the same region.

3.3 International Cooperation Layout of Sino-TNHE under the BRI

As of 2023, 19 countries from Asia, Europe, Africa, Oceania, and other parts of the world have joined the BRI and are engaged in Sino-TNHE. The most mature cooperation partners, in terms of scale and growth

of Sino-TNHE, are Russia and South Korea. The number of established Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions with the two countries accounts for over 50% of the total incremental number in all the aforementioned 19 countries. This suggests that Sino-TNHE has experienced a certain level of concentration, with significant growth primarily concentrated in specific countries. However, efforts have been made to promote coordinated and balanced development. Nine countries have established educational cooperation with China since joining the BRI, progressing from no Sino-TNHE at all. Additionally, it is important to note that a comprehensive correlation between one specific country and one Chinese province at both junior and undergraduate college levels, involving both programmes and institutions, has not been established. The correlation between one country and one Chinese province participating in Sino-TNHE exists only at a certain education level and for a certain type of education mode.

3.4 Discipline and Major Structuring of Sino-TNHE under the BRI

Since the launch of the BRI, China has expanded its TNHE with the BRI partner countries to cover all major categories at the junior college level and most undergraduate disciplines. In general, a connection exists between the number of programmes and institutions offering a specific discipline or major category and the number of involved co-cooperation countries: if a discipline or major category is offered in multiple programmes and institutions, it also concerns more cooperation countries. The transportation category at the junior college level, especially railway transportation as a specialised major category, is a unique case. The growth of railway transportation is significant and concentrated in a few countries, reflecting the dynamic changes in the discipline and major setting of Sino-TNHE. Certain major categories are developing rapidly, and significant correlations have formed between certain disciplines or major categories and specific cooperation countries. Furthermore, partner countries' professional strengths may be a crucial factor in determining the appropriate education majors. This can result in a correlation between a country and a specific discipline or major category, such as the connection between Italy as the partner country and the art discipline. It can therefore also be argued that the cooperation in the frame of Sino-foreign-TNHE has been to some extent concentrated on specific disciplines and major categories.

Conclusions

Based on objective data, this paper analyses the development of TNHE between China and the countries participating in the BRI. In terms of the scale of education conduction, the number of Sino-TNHE programmes and institutions has significantly increased. Regarding the spatial cooperation, namely the Chinese provinces where the education is conducted and the cooperation countries, the characteristics of spatial aggregation are exhibited. It is important to recognise that currently, some Chinese provinces along the Belt and Road still have limited participation in Sino-TNHE, and the education cooperation with some of the BRI co-construction countries has not yet expanded to Sino-TNHE. In general, there is still potential for further cooperation in Sino-TNHE between Chinese provinces and the BRI co-construction countries. In terms of disciplines and majors, it is clear that while Sino-TNHE encompasses a wide range of discipline categories and majors, a considerable number of programmes and institutions are concentrated in some specific discipline or majors.

As the development of Sino-TNHE has reached a certain scale in some regions, the established partnerships should be considered essential. It is of equal importance to reinforce existing partnerships and establish new ones. The geographical advantages of cooperation between certain Chinese provinces and BRI co-construction countries must be fully utilised to propel further advancement and enhance

underdeveloped cooperation in other regions through the phenomenon of spillover effects. In order to promote diverse development and prevent the homogenisation of educational disciplines and majors, it is necessary to leverage the strengths of both Chinese domestic provinces and the partner countries. To achieve an optimal structure and coordinated development of the educational disciplines and majors offered by Sino-TNHE, it is crucial to enhance the forward-looking layout. The structure of the disciplines and majors should give priority to emerging fields and industry development. The incorporation of the index of social benefit into the decision-making process for major settings and constructions can help to avoid the disjunction between the talent cultivation and the actual needs of society.

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TARPTAUTINIO AUKŠTOJO MOKSLO VALDYMAS PAGAL „VIENOS JUOSTOS, VIENO KELIO“ INICIATYVĄ: AUGIMO MASTAS, REGIONINIS BENDRADARBIAVIMAS IR PAGRINDINIŲ STUDIJŲ PROGRAMŲ IŠDĖSTYMAS

Jingyao Su

Santrauka. Tarptautiniai mainai ir bendradarbiavimas – svarbūs „Vienos juostos, vieno kelio“ iniciatyvos (angl. *Belt and Road Initiative*, BRI) aspektai. Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjamos tarptautinės aukštojo mokslo studijų programos ir įstaigos, kurias Kinija per pastarąjį dešimtmetį įsteigė bendradarbiaudama su BRI bendrai kuriančiomis šalimis. Aptariami empiriniai tyrimai, susiję su augimo mastu, regioninėmis švietimo veiklos vietomis, bendrai BRI kuriančiomis šalimis, taip pat su disciplinų ir pagrindinių studijų programų ypatumais. Duomenys buvo analizuoti taikant porinių imčių Vilkoksono rangų ir Chi kvadrato testus. Rezultatai atskleidė, kad tarptautinių bendradarbiavimo programų ir įstaigų skaičius itin išaugo. Nepaisant to, tarptautinio aukštojo mokslo plėtra BRI sistemoje atskleidžia susitelkimo tendenciją, kuri koncentruojama konkrečiose Kinijos vietinėse provincijose ir bendradarbiaujančiose šalyse, taip pat tam tikrose disciplinų srityse. Siekiant skatinti tarptautinį bendradarbiavimą aukštojo mokslo srityje svarbu atsižvelgti į regioninius pranašumus, aktualius abiejų universitetų partnerių ir darbo rinkos poreikius, į pramonės plėtrą.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: tarptautinio aukštojo mokslo valdymas; BRI; pagrindinių studijų programų struktūrizavimas; regioninis bendradarbiavimas; jaunesniųjų ir aukštesniųjų kursų koleginis išsilavinimas.