
Studies on the Implementation Pathway of ‘Credit System’ Reform Through Sino-foreign Joint Education Programs

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Abstract

Sino-foreign Joint Education Programs (SJEPs) is an important strategy for Chinese universities to improve the level of international education. It has been carried out in China for more than 30 years. Yunnan province currently has 23 SJEPs for undergraduates and graduates level. The implementation of SJEPs has promoted the reform of ‘credit system’ in Yunnan universities in recent years. Based on an investigation of current SJEPs and the situation of complete credit system reform in Yunnan province, this paper puts forward an implementation pathway to promote the ‘credit system’ reform through SJEPs.

Keywords: pathway; credit system; reform; Sino-foreign Joint Education Programs

1. China Government’s Policies Related to SJEPs and Credit System

1.1 China Government’s policies on Sino-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools

- 1) Policy1 on SJEPs: ‘The Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Sino-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools’ (The State Council, March 2003).
- 2) Policy2 on SJEPs: ‘Measures for the Implementation of Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Sino-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools’ (the Ministry of Education, March 2004).
- 3) Policy3 on SJEPs: ‘Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Several Issues Concerning Current Sino-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools’ (the Ministry of Education, March 2006).
- 4) Policy4 on SJEPs: ‘Opinions on Opening Up Education to the Outside World in the New Era’ (The State Council, April, 2016).

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1.2 China Government's policies on 'Credit System' Reform

1) Policy1 on Credit System: 'Outline of the National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)' (the Ministry of Education, July 2010). It highlights to 'Deepen the teaching reform, promote and improve the credit system, implement the flexible school system, and promote the integration of arts and science'.

2) Policy2 on Credit System: 'Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of High-level Undergraduate Education and Comprehensively Improving Talent Cultivation Ability' (Article.[2018] No.2). (The Ministry of Education, October 2018). It called for to improving the credit system, promoting a sound credit system and fee management system, expanding students' learning autonomy and choice, encouraging students to study across disciplines and majors, and allowing students to choose majors and courses independently.

3) Policy3 on Credit System: 'Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Deepening the Reform of Undergraduate Education and Teaching and Comprehensively Improving the Quality of Talent Training (Article [2019] No. 6). (the Ministry of Education, September 2019). It called for Supporting schools to further improve the credit system and expanding students' learning autonomy and choice.

2. Investigations on the Current Situations of SJEPs of Chinese Universities

2.1 General Situations of SJEPs and Cooperative Education Institutes in China.

According to the statistics of the MOE of China, the total numbers of SJEPs including programs offered by independent sino-foreign joint education institutes were 2,467 by June 2022. Among these programs, there were 1,427 SJEPs at undergraduate and graduate level, and other less than 1000 programs were at the diploma level. The SJEPs organized by Chinese universities and colleges were majority, account for 95% of the total, with about 600,000 on-campus students and over 2 million graduates. Colleges and universities in 30 provinces and autonomous regions in China have launched 1,246 SJEPs at the undergraduate and graduate level, enrolling more than 100,000 students in the year of 2021. In addition, with the approval of the MOE of China, there were 181 independent sino-foreign cooperative education institutes were established in 23 provinces and autonomous regions in China, among which 10 with legal person status and 171 without legal person status.

2.2 General Situations of SJEPs in Yunnan Provinces.

According to the latest data from the MOE of China, there are 23 SJEPs for undergraduate and graduate level in Yunnan Province by June 2022, and there is still no sino-foreign cooperative education institutes established in Yunnan yet. Yunnan University of Finance and Economics is the first university running SJEPs and it has held 4 undergraduate level SJEPs and 2 graduate level SJEPs at present. There are totally 2,300 students enrolling in these SJEPs. Yunnan University of Finance and Economics has been organized SJEPs for more than 20 years, and it offers programs for Real Estate, Project Management, International Economics and Trade, Accounting, Finance and Hotel Management. Other universities in Yunnan Province have carried out SJEPs successively. The number of SJEPs organized by universities in Yunnan are listed as below (Table1):

No.	Name of the University	Number Of SJEPs	Level
1	Yunnan University of Finance and Economics	6	Graduate+ Undergraduate
2	Yunnan University	4	Undergraduate
3	Yunnan Agricultural University	4	Undergraduate
4	Yunnan Normal University	3	Undergraduate
5	Kunming University of Science and Technology	2	Undergraduate
6	Yunnan Minzu University	1	Graduate
7	Kunming Medical University	1	Undergraduate
8	Southwest Forestry University	1	Undergraduate
9	Yunnan Arts University	1	Undergraduate
	Total	23	

Table 1: Sino-foreign Joint Education Programs in Yunnan Province

Among all 23 SJEPs in Yunnan Province, they are divided into 5 categories according to the majors and disciplines, which are management, engineering, arts, economics, education and medicine. The number of students enrolled in 23 SJEPs in Yunnan province is 2320, accounting for only 2% of the total number of students enrolled in SJEPs in China. Compared with other provinces in China, Yunnan has a relatively small number of students registered for SJEPs, which is mainly due to the limited number of SJEPs offered by the universities in Yunnan. However, the SJEPs in Yunnan Province have grown rapidly in the past five years. It can be predicted that the number of students registered for SJEPs in Yunnan province will have a big increase in the period of time after 2022.

3. Investigations on the Credit System of Chinese Universities

3.1 Brief History of the Credit System Development.

The credit system originated from Elective Course System, which first started by University of Berlin at the beginning of the 19th century. German educator Vilhelm Von Humholdt put forwarded some new educational ideas, which states as: ‘the university shall respect the freedom of academic research, focus on the research of profound knowledge, allow students to choose courses and lecturers freely’, thus, the Elective Course System had adopted in some universities at that time. At the end of 19th century, the Elective Course System was first introduced to Harvard University, and eventually developed into the credit system among universities in United States.

In China, the credit system was introduced by Cai Yuanpei, the former president of Peking University in 1918, then it was extended to other universities in China. In 1929, the Nationalist Government of China formulated the University Constitution, which made the credit system be established in China. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the government implemented a large-scale planned economic system followed the Soviet Union.

Some of the policies, including educational policies, have been abolished. The credit system was considered not suitable for the planned economic system of China during that period of time and thus been canceled. In 1978, the Third plenary session of the eleventh Communist Party of China (CCP) Central Committee was held, and the MOE of China clearly stated that ‘credit system can be implemented in some universities conditionally’. As a result, the teaching model of credit system has been developing slowly in China. In 1985, the Decision of the Central Committee of the CPC on the Reform of the Educational System proposed that universities shall reduce compulsory courses, increase elective courses, implement the credit system and double degree system, then the credit system has been further developed in China. In 1993, the government promulgated the Outline of China's Education Reform and Development, and the MOE of China encouraged colleges and universities to implement the credit system and adopt advanced teaching management models. Credit system has achieved rapid development in the following years, and more colleges and universities adopted this system because it meets the needs of higher education development.

In 2010, the MOE of China promulgated Outline of the National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020). In this outline, MOE proposed to ‘promote the credit system, adopt flexible school year.’ In recent five year, a new round of deepening the reform of undergraduate education has taken place. The re-introduction of ‘credit system’ has received unprecedented attention, and it has become one of the most effective reform measures to promote the construction of disciplines & majors in colleges and universities in China.

3.2 Credit System Reform in China and Its Main Advantages.

1) Credit System Reform

The teaching management modes in colleges and universities of China are divided into school-year system and credit system at present. The school-year system evaluates students by academic years, however the credit system evaluates students based on the measurement of credits. At the beginning of the 21st century, some universities in China have partially adopted the so-called Credit System, but this credit system is not the complete credit system, and it is called a revised version of the traditional school-year system or a mixed management model of school-year system and credit system. The partial credit system provide limited freedom for teachers and students, and made its personnel training scheme, course credits measurement, tuition fees, graduation conditions according to previous school-year system. It still not meet the requirement of MOE of China, and not march MOE’s policies of deepening the reform of undergraduate education in the new era. This incomplete credit system and teaching management mode do not adapt to many aspects, and eventually become the restriction factor of higher education reform.

The new round of ‘complete credit system’ adheres to ‘Student-orientation’ teaching management concept, and its core elements include: course selection system, academic tutors, flexible school-year , digital education platform, credit system and credit tuition fee management. In recent five year (the 13th Five-year Plan period of the China government), more colleges and universities in China has launched the complete credit system, the first batch universities to adopt credit system include: Wuhan University, Shenzhen University, Zhongnan

University of Economics and Law, Northwest University, East China Normal University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Henan University of Science and Technology, TaiShan University, Nanfang College etc. Honghe University (the former Mengzi Teachers' College) was the first one to implement complete credit system in Yunnan province. The new round of 'complete credit system' in Yunnan began in 2019 when, together with the comprehensive educational evaluation to all undergraduate majors & programs carried by the Yunnan Provincial Department of the Education.

2) Main Advantages

The new round of 'complete credit system' is student-orientation, and it pays more attentions to students' personality development, it provides more freedom to students in choosing courses and lecturers, it supports students to choose diverse majors or minors. The adoption of complete credit system benefits the colleges and universities in the following aspects:

It promotes the innovation of university's teaching model.

It conductive to the construction of disciplines & majors.

It promotes the development of faculties & staffs.

It help to establish a quality assurance system.

In summary, the 'complete credit system' has become one of the important reform directions of many colleges and universities in China now. It is beneficial to mobilize different teaching resources, to improve students' learning desire, to inspire teachers' teaching enthusiasm, and to make the teaching management of universities more efficient.

4. The Implementation Pathway of Credit System Reform through SJEPs.

4.1 The Relationships Between SJEPs and Credit System Reform.

On the one hand, SJEPs plays an important role in promoting the international educational level of universities & colleges in China. It helps to promote its teaching, scientific research, professional discipline construction, personnel cultivation etc. On the other hand, SJEPs can indeed promote the reform of Credit System. Authors of this article conduct a simple conceptual framework to clarify the relationships between SJEPs and credit system, which is also useful to explore the implementation pathway of the credit system reform.

The relationship between SJEPs and the reform of credit system is shown in Figure below (Figure1):

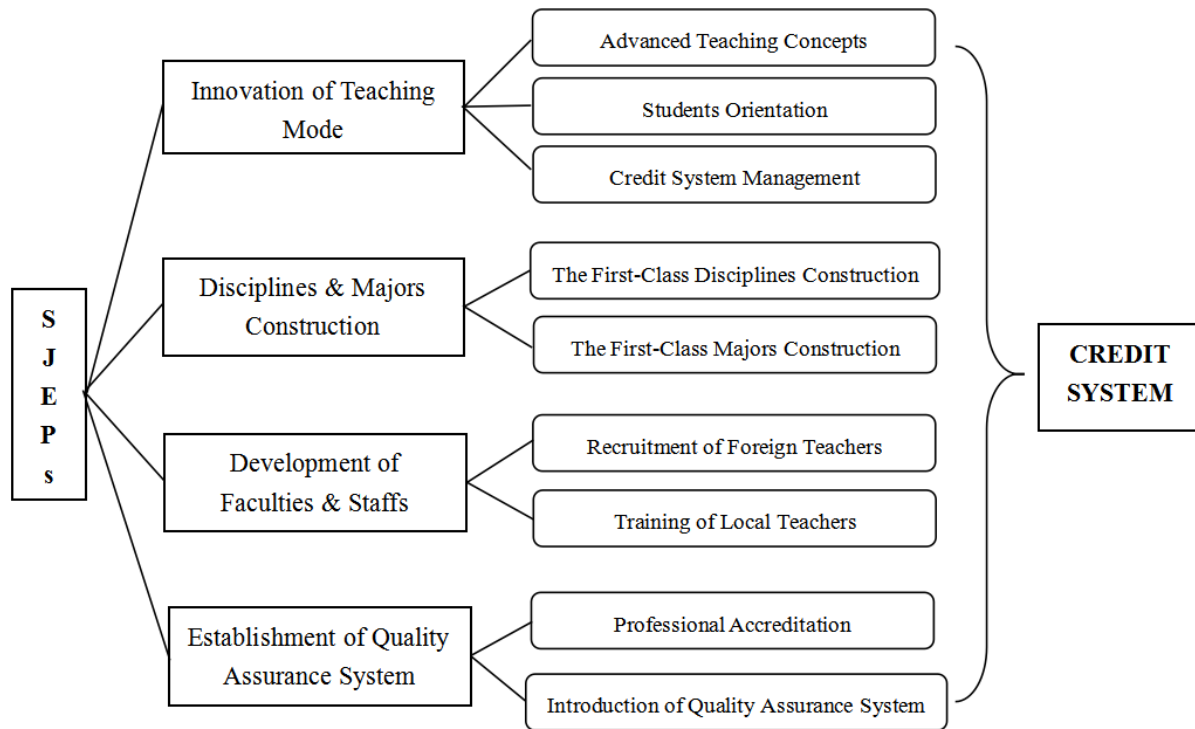


Figure1: Relationships between SJEPS and Credit System (Conceptual Framework)

4.2 The Implementation Pathway of Credit System Reform

1) Pathway1: SJEPS helps to transfer China universities’ traditional teaching & personnel training mode to the innovated modes. First, Universities in western countries adopted credit system earlier than China’s, the goal of credit system is to cultivate outstanding citizens of the world, and focus on students’ personalities and individual education level. The goal of Chinese universities adopted SJEPS is to train socialist builders and successors. So the western teaching & personnel training mode is an advanced concept to China and it promotes Chinese universities’ credit system reform. Secondly, carrying out SJEPS will promote “student-orientation” teaching, and continuous improve undergraduate education and teaching level. For example, introduction of international partners online courses by SJEPS benefits domestic students, it promotes the development of the massive online courses (MOOCs) as well as the establishment of online platform under the conditions of COVID-19 epidemic. Thirdly, SJEPS usually adopts the educational form of "3+1" or "2+2" etc. (eg. “3+1” means 3-year domestic education in China and 1-year overseas education), the overseas education part enhances students’ English proficiency and competence, it also improves student independent learning and critical thinking. Finally, the SJEPS promotes the standardization of the ‘credit system’ management system.

2) Pathway2: SJEPS promotes the disciplines & majors construction of Chinese universities. On the one hand, carrying out SJEPS can introduce the curriculum modules and textbooks from foreign partners, which is conducive to the construction of Sino-foreign integrated disciplines & majors in Chinese universities. According to the rules of MOE of China, one third of the core

courses set in SJEPs shall be introduced from foreign partners and be taught by foreign teachers. Obviously, these introduced courses are very important to disciplines & majors construction of Chinese universities. On the other hand, carrying out SJEPs will continuously improve the existing majors and curricula of Chinese universities, improve the existing teaching model, and finally cultivate high-quality and international-oriented talents, which is also conducive to the construction of disciplines and majors. In addition, compared with ordinary majors in China, the majors offered by Chinese-foreign cooperative institutes provide more intensive English courses and electives for students, so it enhance students' foreign language skills and cross-cultural communication skills, thus leading to higher employment rate and enrollment rate. In conclusion, carrying out SJEPs is one of the effective pathways to promote the credit system reform in Chinese colleges and universities.

3) Pathway3: SJEPs promotes the development of staffs of Chinese universities. First, SJEPs helps to introducing foreign staffs, most of the introduced core courses are taught by foreign teachers, and many SJEPs also employ foreign language teachers and tutors to participate in teaching in China. Secondly, the domestic teachers joining SJEPs will have opportunities to participate in teaching core courses, some of them also got trained by foreign partner universities, so Chinese staffs improved their teaching skills and broaden their horizon as well. Thirdly, SJEPs helps the establishment of Chinese and foreign teachers' team. Due to the demand of communication and teaching cooperation between Chinese and foreign teachers in SJEPs, many universities have built a platform for both teaching and research, thus formed a teaching team between Chinese and foreign cooperative partners. To carry on credit system reform, a group of experiences teachers with high academic level are needed, the cooperative teachers team from SJEPS had laid a solid foundation for it. In summary,

The SJEPS will promotes the implementation of credit system form by providing Sino-foreign cooperative teachers teams. One the one hand, SJEPS strengthens the training of domestic teachers, on the other hand it introduces high-quality teachers from foreign partner universities. It not only ensures the teacher-student ratio at Chinese universities, but also ensures that each major owns a group of stable and high-quality teachers to carry out teaching, thus promoting the development of the teaching staffs.

4) Pathway4: SJEPs helps to establish quality assurance system for Chinese higher education. It thus promote the credit system reform in the colleges and universities in China. According to the requirements of the Foreign-related Education & Supervision Office of the MOE of China, SJEPS and Sino-foreign cooperative institutes with bachelor's degree or postgraduate degrees must undergo annual assessment every four years. This professional annual assessment and certification guarantee the quality of Sino-foreign cooperative education. On the one hand, MOE of China encourage all undergraduate level programs offered by Chinese universities to participate in Professional Accreditation (PA), and this PA promotes disciplines & majors development and guarantees the quality of undergraduate teaching in China. On the other hand, all SJEPs must pass higher education quality assessment by both China government and the foreign government (here refers to the cooperative host country) to ensure its quality. For example, all SJEPs cooperated with UK shall pass British QAA system to ensure its quality. In

summary, SJEPS will play a promoting role in ensuring the quality of undergraduate teaching, then it benefits the Chinese universities educational reform. At the same time, the SJEPS helps to establish higher educational quality assurance system which including PA and other quality system standards. These professional accreditation and quality assurance system further drive Chinese colleges and universities to carry out ‘credit system’ reform and ultimately promote China’s higher education development.

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