

The Global Mission of Chinese Higher Education: A Four-Dimensional Framework for Global Governance

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Drawing on the analytical framework of “a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind,” this article examines the multidimensional mission of universities in global governance transformation through four dimensions: talent co-cultivation, knowledge co-creation, civilizational mutual learning, win-win cooperation. Using a foreign language university’s practices as illustrative reference, the analysis shows that realizing this mission depends on four key mechanisms: integrated talent cultivation, problem-oriented interdisciplinary research, equal-dialogue-based civilizational exchange, and open collaborative networks for international cooperation.

Keywords: higher education mission, global governance, university social responsibility, a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, cross-cultural education, international cooperation

Introduction: Global Governance Transformation and the New Mission of Higher Education

Climate change, public health crises, digital divides, and geopolitical conflicts are intertwined, posing challenges to existing international governance systems. Meanwhile, the knowledge economy and the information technology revolution are reshaping global talent competition patterns, making higher education vital.

The question of “what universities are for” has acquired new significance. Traditionally linked to nation-state construction, universities have cultivated national elites and served national development. Yet facing challenges that transcend national boundaries, whether and how higher education institutions should assume broader global responsibilities has become a critical issue in international education research.

International scholarship has reached several consensuses on this matter. The Global Citizenship Education (GCE) framework emphasizes that higher education should cultivate students with threefold capabilities: “global literacy, social responsibility, and transformative participation” (Bosio & Schattle, 2023; Pashby et al., 2020; Damiani & Fraillon, 2025). University Social Responsibility (USR) theory posits that universities should respond to challenges facing humanity through knowledge creation and social engagement (Bayuo et al., 2020). These theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for international dialogue regarding the global mission of Chinese universities. This study employs “a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind” as an analytical framework. The framework envisions a world of lasting peace, universal security, shared prosperity, openness and inclusiveness, and a clean and beautiful environment. This framework is operationalized into four interrelated dimensions: talent co-cultivation, knowledge co-creation, civilizational mutual learning, and win-win cooperation. These four dimensions are analytically distinct yet practically intertwined: talent co-cultivation provides the agents for

knowledge production and cooperation; knowledge co-creation supplies the intellectual foundation for policy and practice; civilizational mutual learning establishes the cultural basis for sustainable partnerships; and win-win cooperation offers the institutional platforms through which the other dimensions are realized.

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach combining conceptual analysis and policy synthesis. Rather than pursuing an empirical case study, it constructs a multidimensional analytical framework grounded in three sources: international theoretical literature, Chinese policy documents, and institutional materials from Beijing International Studies University (BISU)-the latter used for illustrative purposes only.

The analysis proceeds through thematic synthesis across the four dimensions. Each dimension is examined through a consistent lens: theoretical rationale is established through engagement with scholarship, operational meaning is specified within the “community with a shared future” framework, and BISU practices are introduced as illustrations. This structure positions the paper as theory-building and policy-oriented analysis, with institutional materials enhancing concreteness rather than claiming generalizability. The framework is designed to be transferable to other contexts, though future empirical testing is needed.

Talent Co-Cultivation

From “International Talent” to “Global Governance Talent”

Under the framework of future-oriented talent co-cultivation, global governance talent must be prepared for both international engagement and national service—a dual commitment that directly supports the community with a shared future for mankind’s vision of lasting peace and universal security. The era of globalization poses dual challenges to higher education talent cultivation. On one hand, single-language abilities or technical skills can no longer prepare graduates for the complexities of international negotiations, global policy coordination, or cross-border crisis management. On the other hand, the cultivation of global governance talent cannot be divorced from specific professional foundations and national identity. How to establish connections between “global competence” and “professional capability” has become a key issue in reforming talent cultivation models.

International research indicates that global citizenship education should encompass three pillars: global literacy (systemic thinking and cross-cultural understanding), social responsibility (ethical reasoning and justice concern), and transformative participation (action competence and conflict resolution) (Ak ay et al., 2024; Bosio, 2021). For Chinese universities, this means embedding global perspectives within professional education while anchoring global literacy cultivation in professional foundations.

Taking foreign language universities as an example, their talent cultivation is undergoing transformation from “language tool users” to “area studies experts”. Traditional foreign language education focused on linguistic skill training, whereas contemporary global governance requires compound talents of “language + area + profession”—proficient in the target country’s language, deeply understanding its political, economic, and cultural contexts, and possessing analytical capabilities in specific professional domains (such as international law, international trade, environmental policy). This transformation of cultivation models responds to the demand for global governance talent.

Expanding Practice Fields: From Classroom to Global Affairs Sites

Global citizenship education requires combining classroom learning with practical engagement, allowing students to develop cross-cultural communication and problem-solving capabilities in authentic contexts (Casmana et al., 2023; Helm et al., 2024).

For Chinese universities, expanding practice fields means proactively engaging with international organizations, multinational enterprises, international events, and other platforms to provide students with opportunities to participate in global affairs. This “embedded” learning differs from traditional overseas study tours; it requires students to participate in actual work in specific roles (such as interns, volunteers, researchers), enhancing their capabilities through engagement with concrete issues. For example, participating in conference organization, assisting with field research for cross-border projects, or providing language services at international events can enhance students’ global competence.

Notably, expanding practice fields requires avoiding two tendencies: first, reducing international experience to “credentialing” consumption lacking substantive learning design; second, equating global participation with “de-nationalization”, neglecting the strategic needs of national talent cultivation. Effective practical education should enhance global capabilities while strengthening students’ awareness and capacity to safeguard national interests and participate in international competition. BISU students have undertaken internships at UNWTO and the UN Resident Coordinator Office, participated in the IOC’s volunteer program for the Paris Olympics, and engaged in Model UN conferences and multilateral diplomatic forums including the Belt and Road Forum.

Knowledge Co-Creation

Knowledge Production and the Provision of Global Public Goods

Under the principle of challenge-driven knowledge co-creation, research should address shared global challenges-climate change, public health, digital ethics-and contribute knowledge as global public goods, advancing the vision of a world of shared prosperity. Chinese universities have moved from catching up with international research frontiers to, in some cases, co-developing and even shaping them. Against the backdrop of global governance transformation, this transformation could be further advanced by reorienting from “autonomous development” to “extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits”-that is, the research of Chinese universities should not only serve national development but also contribute to the provision of global knowledge public goods.

This transformation faces dual challenges. On one hand, Western-centric academic evaluation systems still dominate international academia, with knowledge production from non-Western countries often occupying marginal positions (Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2023). On the other hand, research on global issues requires interdisciplinary and cross-border collaboration, while existing research organization models remain fundamentally framed by disciplinary boundaries and national borders.

Addressing these challenges requires three shifts: problem-oriented agenda-setting that anchors research in shared global challenges; interdisciplinary methodology that integrates humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences; and diversified cooperation networks that extend to Global South and emerging economies.

Enriching Global Governance Knowledge With Chinese Practice

As the world’s largest developing country, China’s modernization process provides rich material for accumulating global governance knowledge. From poverty alleviation to the digital economy, from ecological civilization construction to public health response, these practices contain experiences that can be referenced by other developing countries.

Universities serve as “knowledge transformers”-elevating Chinese practice into theoretical propositions and disseminating them through academic discourse, for instance by adapting development experience to diverse

national contexts through area studies and cross-cultural communication research. This process must avoid two pitfalls: absolutizing local experiences as universal models, or overemphasizing particularity such that local knowledge cannot become a global public good. BISU's China-Arab Cultural and Tourism Cooperation Research Center exemplifies balanced knowledge transformation-it conducts joint research with Arab scholars on tourism and heritage, disseminates bilingual co-authored policy briefs, and was recognized by the 11th China-Arab Civilizational Dialogue as an institutional mechanism for intercultural exchange.

Civilizational Mutual Learning

Cross-Cultural Dialogue and Knowledge Translation

Civilizational conflicts often stem from misunderstandings, which frequently arise from asymmetries in knowledge dissemination. Universities serve as “knowledge translators”—not in the narrow sense of linguistic conversion, but as intellectual interpreters that render one civilization's conceptual system comprehensible to another civilization while preserving cultural depth. Promoting civilizational dialogue requires expanding the universalization of knowledge translation.

Language learning is immersive exposure to different modes of thinking and cultural logics. Researchers proficient in multiple languages can access diverse knowledge production sites, understand concept generation, and achieve more accurate cross-cultural interpretation—a “deep translation” capability that neither machine translation nor superficial communication can replace.

Three Mechanisms for Civilizational Dialogue

Effective civilizational dialogue can be advanced through three mechanisms:

First, the “decoding” mechanism for cross-cultural understanding. This requires researchers not only to master the target country's language but also to understand its knowledge traditions, academic norms, and cultural presuppositions. For example, when translating Chinese philosophical concepts into Western academic discourse, it is necessary to both preserve meanings and find theoretical frameworks for dialogue.

Second, the “ferrying” mechanism for intellectual dialogue. Universities should become platforms for the exchange of wisdom among different civilizations, promoting bidirectional knowledge flows through academic conferences, joint research, and student/faculty exchanges. This “ferrying” is not simple information transmission but the generation of new knowledge possibilities through dialogue.

Third, the “bridge-building” mechanism for people-to-people connectivity. Through educational cooperation, cultural exchange, and youth interaction, universities establish emotional connections at the interpersonal level, laying socio-psychological foundations for global cooperation. BISU-affiliated Confucius Institutes in the UK and Panama host research centers on cultural heritage and tourism. The university maintains 32 cooperative platforms across 24 countries, while one faculty's video series on contemporary China has received wide international viewership.

Win-Win Cooperation

From Bilateral Exchange to Network Co-construction

Under the framework of co-construction-and-sharing-based win-win cooperation, international educational cooperation should shift toward multilateral networks and horizontal partnerships, operationalizing the “extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits” principle of global governance. Traditional

international educational cooperation has primarily taken the form of bilateral exchanges-student exchange, faculty visits, and joint training programs. This model faces efficiency bottlenecks in the era of globalization: limited cooperation scope, dispersed resource allocation, and difficulty in achieving scale effects.

Future educational cooperation needs to shift in three directions: from bilateral exchanges to multilateral networking around shared challenges; from physical mobility to virtual collaboration, reducing costs and expanding participation; and from unidirectional export to joint construction and sharing, replacing donor-recipient dynamics with equal partnership. Chinese universities can combine their development experience with partner countries' needs to co-develop curricula, establish research centers, and cultivate talent.

Practical Exploration of “Belt and Road” Educational Cooperation

The Belt and Road Initiative provides an important platform for Chinese universities' international cooperation. This cooperation framework is characterized by: development-orientation, demand-driven approaches, and win-win objectives, distinguishing it from the hierarchical structures of traditional international educational cooperation (Pasara & Mhlanga, 2023; Uleanya & Yassim, 2025).

In practice, Belt and Road educational cooperation can include the following dimensions:

Talent cultivation cooperation. Cultivating urgently needed professional talent for partner countries in fields such as infrastructure construction, public health, and agricultural technology. Such cultivation does not simply replicate Chinese models but involves customized design combining local actual needs.

Research collaboration networks. Establishing joint research mechanisms around common challenges faced by partner countries (such as desertification control, transboundary water resource management, infectious disease prevention and control), producing knowledge products with regional applicability.

Cultural exchange platforms. Promoting mutual understanding among peoples of partner countries through art festivals, academic forums, and youth camps, laying humanistic foundations for economic cooperation. BISU has established an overseas campus integrated into Morocco's national higher education system, expanded partnerships in Malaysia and Panama, and seconded a professor to a vice-presidential role at an Uzbek university-illustrating a shift toward institutionalized multilateral cooperation.

Conclusion: Re-positioning the Global Mission of Higher Education

This article has analyzed the mission and pathways of universities in global governance transformation through four interrelated dimensions: talent co-cultivation, knowledge co-creation, civilizational mutual learning, and win-win cooperation. The research indicates that the global mission of higher education is not a substitute for nation-state responsibilities but an expansion at a higher level-by cultivating globally competent talent, producing knowledge oriented toward common challenges, promoting deep dialogue among civilizations, and building open collaborative networks, universities can simultaneously serve national development and the interests of humanity.

Addressing these challenges-power asymmetries, geopolitical interference, and utilitarian tendencies-requires universities to maintain strategic composure, safeguarding academic autonomy in open cooperation while upholding value positions in global engagement.

Future research can further explore several pressing questions. The conception of “global mission” is likely to vary significantly across national contexts, particularly between Global North and South institutions (Skokić et al., 2025; Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025), and the extent to which research-intensive versus teaching-

oriented universities conceptualize their global roles differently remains an open empirical question (Choukrani & Ghneim-Herrera, 2025). In addition, the rapid advancement of digital technologies is reshaping international cooperation models in higher education-from virtual exchange to AI-assisted collaborative research-yet its implications for equity, quality, and sustainability are only beginning to be understood (Koivunen et al., 2024). Addressing these questions will contribute to deepening theoretical understanding and innovating practical approaches to the global governance of higher education.

While the framework is derived primarily from the Chinese institutional context and illustrated through a single university's experience, its analytical dimensions-talent, knowledge, culture, and cooperation-are designed to be transferable. Future empirical research across diverse national and institutional settings is needed to test and refine its applicability. The study also acknowledges the inherent tension between national service and global public good missions, which warrants ongoing critical examination.

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