The Paradoxes of Developing European Transnational Campuses in China and Egypt

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Abstract	Article Info
Through the lens of paradox theory, we present and discuss the cases of two different proposals for a European public university, located in Lisbon, Portugal, to develop transnational campuses, one in China and one in Egypt. We discuss the three overarching goals of the transnational campus in our cases (funding through international cooperation, projection of soft power, and the development of human capital) and compare the structure of both proposals with particular attention to the governance and pedagogical models proposed for China and the Middle East, and shed light on the different expectations that Middle Eastern and Chinese authorities hold regarding the cooperation with European institutions in the area of higher education. We conclude that the development of transnational campus can be considered a paradoxical journey and the success of which depends on how the tensions between goals are tackled and synergies obtained – or not.	

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This will help in designing adequate policies and strategies in order to optimize the cooperation.

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Introduction

This paper analyzes two different proposals made to a European public university, Nova University Lisbon (NOVA), for developing transnational campuses (see Cao, 2011 on the nature of the transnational campus), a strategic choice increasingly employed by Western universities, especially those with substantial academic credentials (Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011; Wilkins, 2016). The first is in the Middle East (Egypt) and the second in China. We address two main topics. First, we consider the experience of transnational campuses in China and the Middle East. Clearly, the current proposals base their governance and pedagogical models on the past presence of transnational campuses in these parts of the world. Second, we discuss such proposals at the light of the expectations generated by the implementation of transnational campuses. The European higher education institutions involved may generate quite different expectations as compared to the national authorities, either the Middle Eastern or the Chinese. Such different expectations on these campuses

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may reflect different goals, not necessarily aligned. One such comparative study will help in designing of adequate policies and strategies to optimize cooperation in a field in which there may be potentially contradictory goals, as will be discussed below.

In this comparative study, we ask: *how can different transnational campus models realize their plural and perhaps contradictory goals?* We focus on the transnational university campus as a tool in the broader process of the internationalization of higher education (Amaro de Matos et al., 2021) and emphasize the paradoxical challenges involved, i.e. the interdependent but opposing goals involved (Gaim et al., 2022), combining educational, diplomatic and business logics. Such goals are: (1) the development of human capital, (2) the projection of soft power by the European university, and (3) attraction of financial resources through international cooperation.

Transnational campuses are a natural experimental field for change implementation in light of both the distance and the cross-cultural challenges involved. NOVA, where both authors are based, was offered the opportunity to cooperate in the Chinese project, having decided three years ago for the implementation in Egypt. We perform the comparative analysis of the two cases using this recent experience in the process of negotiating and/or implementing transnational campuses and addressing the leadership challenges. The use of the transnational campus is not simply about the strategy underlying the implementation of these projects, but rather on how foreign brands and reputation are used, pedagogical and scientific knowledge is transferred, and quality control is implemented in order to truly benefit the shaping of a new generation of leaders. The bottom line to consider from a western perspective is (a) the governance structure in

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place; (b) academic and intellectual freedom, and (c) the type of constraints that the project may face. We study the tensions that accompany the implementation of the initiative and the importance of managing the tensions inherent to the development of the transnational campus.

We organize the article as follows. First, we discuss the different political conditions under which the offers to cooperate in the development of transnational campuses in China and the Middle East occurred. Then we analyze how those circumstances influenced the way the offers were perceived and dealt with. We discuss the opportunities that led to the creation of transnational campuses and the business model. We then consider the paradoxical challenges involved. We contribute to the discussion of universities as constituting (1) a tool of cooperation between states, (2) levers of human capital development, and (3) instruments of soft power. These objectives are achieved via different means depending on national strategies and political contexts and how the actors involved manage the inherent contradictions between goals, given the plurality of motives and agendas involved.

Theory Development

To discuss the pursuit of the goals outlined above, one must consider five six contextual factors, which constitute the background for the subsequent analysis. First, there is the geopolitical and political context. Whereas in China, the initiative is clearly linked to the development of the center-west region of the country and its relationship to the new Silk Road Strategy, in the Middle Eastern campus, it is related to a demographic and urban deep restructuring

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reform. In China, entrepreneurs will invest in the urban development of strategic areas, bringing benefit to those regions. In the Middle East, on the contrary, there is a specific governmental incentive for large multinational corporations to invest in such urban infrastructure with educational anchors. The young demographics benefits these investments by using the educational structures to attract growing families with a young population, feeding all its associated urbanistic plans (stores, restaurants, malls...). Second, we must consider the way these proposals came about. In China, this opportunity came through the initiative of a former student at a Portuguese university who is willing to invest and has become the bridge between the European institution and the local authorities who made it possible to bring the discussion to the table. In the Middle East, it was initially an inter-governmental diplomatic initiative that raised the issue of the project and made the contact with a multinational firm interested in investing. Third, the role of the states differs regarding the regulation of the initiative. While both states have an active role, as they should, the Chinese regulations prescribe that cooperation be coordinated through a well-established Chinese university, whereas in Egypt the cooperation and governance model will be developed jointly with the multinational investors. Fourth, the business models differ. Although in both cases all capital and operational expenditures are covered, in China the European university will receive a percentage of the revenues generated at the Chinese campus while in Egypt there is a fixed fee per student for their use of the middle east facilities (with a tuition rebate if the student spends a period in Europe). Fifth, with regard to the value creation strategy, the Chinese proposal is to have advanced interdisciplinary undergraduate programs, promoting strong internal cooperation across the different schools at the

European home institution in order to make a consistent pedagogical offer. The curriculum will prepare the Chinese students for immediate entrance to a European Master's program, undertaken in an additional year of intensive study – a clearly accelerating profile for Chinese youth. In Egypt, the strategy will reinforce the European brand while keeping talent at home.

The geographical and political context

After decades of strong development in Eastern China (the area covering the region from Beijing to Shenzhen, including Shanghai) the policy focus has turned to reinforcing the Center-West (Kirby, 2019). Between 1995 and 2002 most of the western transnational campuses were established in big cities and wealthy regions such as Beijing, Shanghai, and the Jangsu and Zhejiang provinces (Huang, 2008).

The current concern of the Chinese authorities is to ensure the development of western regions of the country with projects involving urban expansion, infrastructure, and industrial and knowledge centers across what is to be the integrative project of the New Silk Road, connecting China with neighboring countries, but expanding its connectivity across the whole European continent. The New Silk Road intends to extend its connectivity through Eastern Europe all the way to the rest of the Continent, from the Baltic countries to the Iberian Peninsula. The project aims to balance internal disparities existing in the vast Chinese territory and are an element of the Chinese strategy to fight exclusion and reduce inequalities across the different populations (Amaro de Matos *et al.*, 2021). China is making a $250 billion-a-year investment in human capital, providing a system of scholarships and supporting the development of higher education. However, and as the other side of the same coin, as part of a policy of

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the Chinese authorities to make education more affordable, regulations are changing to prevent institutions from accepting foreign investment.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the development of higher education reforms must cope with domestic and international pressures (Kohstall, 2021). In Egypt, the political movement known as the Arab Spring Revolution (Stepan & Linz, 2013) led to the election of extremist parties to the Parliament and government, with subsequent social instability and failure of the intended reforms. The military took power in order to stabilize society, leading to the later election of President El-Sissy. The priorities established by the current government of Egypt are twofold, targeting education and sustainable urban development for a large, young, and fast-growing population. The challenge in the higher education sector is to achieve greater access while fighting against exclusion and inequality (Buckner, 2013).

The strategy of the Egyptian government considers that only through a profound educational reform is it possible to fight extremism and regain the path of a democratic and participative society. In 2014 the Egyptian government announced a plan to invest US$5.87 billion in education by 2022, from the primary level to higher education. Substantial progress has been achieved – especially regarding gender parity[1] and among disadvantaged groups, but work remains to be done. The results of the initial education reform led the government to announce greater investment to reinforce the sector. For

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[1] See Langsten and Hassan (2018) for the case of primary education.

the fiscal year 2021/22 about EGP 56.4 billion (approximately US$3.6 billion) were allocated to educational services – an increase of 18% from the previous year. This plan considered the demographic growth challenges associated with the quality of urban life of the large majority of the total population (around 105 million in 2017, according to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS)), which is concentrated in the big cities around the Nile (mainly Cairo, Giza and Alexandria). There has also been an increase in public-private partnerships in large-scale education investments. In addition to other private groups, in August 2021 Elsewedy Capital Holding announced that it is investing EGP 2.5 billion in building a new University, and in October 2021 Al Ahly Capital Holding announced EGP 2 billion in middle education. The national context in both countries – China and Egypt – provides fertile conditions for transnational campuses.

Opportunities for developing transnational campuses

While the importance of investing in education is clear for any country because of its role in the development of human capital, the choice to make investments in the realm of international cooperation is less obvious, given the additional costs and the potential misalignment of goals between outer institutions and local authorities. Additionally, the need for growing investments in local competences through education goes hand in hand with concerns regarding the brain drain – and the greater the exposure to international cooperation, the more likely is the brain drain. However, governments approach internationalization as a means to boost economic competitiveness and cultivate global visibility. This is the case of higher education leveraging on the presence of top reputational institutions, and the mass urban development as an attention-seeking effort, as Amaro de

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Matos *et al*. (2021) puts it for China, and Lane (2018) and Adel et al. (2018) for Egypt.

Transnational education is characterized by "the mobility of an education program or higher education institution/provider between countries", according to Knight (2016, p. 36). An extensive cooperation of western universities with local institutions in the Asia-Pacific region begun in the late 1980s. Following the initial cooperation, new forms have become more visible since the 1990s (initially in Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong), as local institutions were unable to satisfy the increasing demand for higher education, and private providers partnered with foreign universities to present new offerings that could appeal to local students fluent in English (Paniagua *et al*., 2022).

International branch campuses (the most visible example of transnational education) provide an educational system located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. As resource intensive as these initiatives are, they are proliferating in the context of increasing international competition. Institutions based on countries exporting such international branches see these arrangements as an opportunity to raise awareness and strategic ties, generate revenue, and recruit students. Countries that import such branches see their potential to boost an internationally competitive educational system at home and meet the needs of the labor market, and regard them as the most suitable form of international cooperation to minimize the risk of brain drain – as the students remain in their own home country.

In China there are private investors promoting the urban development of the new strategic regions, seeing this development as a profitable investment opportunity. They are willing to anchor their

plans in institutions such as universities, which are natural attractors of youth and their families, allowing the development of dynamic communities, with consumption capacity. The large size of the country and its demographic dispersion require a national policy for developing the higher education sector in a coherent and consistent way that is internationally competitive, seeking to dispel regional inequalities and use resources to develop less favored regions as compared to the main international centers (see Amaro de Matos *et al.*, 2021). In China the trend is thus to develop transnational education away from locations such as Shanghai and Beijing.

In Egypt the state provides incentives (Lane, 2018) for multinational Egyptian corporations to invest in large scale urbanistic projects. As in China, such projects may use universities as attractors to justify the development of residential, commercial, and leisure areas within the new cities. Examples are the new developments such as Heliopolis and New Cairo around old Cairo, a city of around 30 million. The government is investing in the construction of a New Administrative Capital to the south-east of Cairo, able to accommodate 6 million people, and include all the administrative buildings of the government. The massive urban development, together with the joint effort to invest and attract investors in basic, secondary, and higher education is a compelling combination for the Government. Political contexts help to understand the way the process unfolds, as we discuss next.

Method

To explore our research question, we consider the case of a Portuguese higher education institution in the social sciences has already been present in China for several decades, with a Master

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Program in Business Administration. A Chinese former student from this program was seeking to invest in the development of a university in the Sichuan province and looking for a European University that could offer a comprehensive scope of subjects, from science and technology to health and social sciences. Among the Portuguese Universities, the Academic Coordinator of the above-mentioned Master Program suggested NOVA as a suitable partner. The contact was made during 2019, and a first site visit occurred, promoting direct contacts with the investor, municipal authorities, and a potential local academic partner, a university in Sichuan province.

In Egypt the energy multinational corporation El Sewedy is involved in the urban development of a section of the new Administrative Capital. A new education-based branch of the group, El Sewedy Education, developed The Knowledge Hub (TKH), a local facility that will serve as the operational basis for the campuses of top European universities. The Portuguese ambassador in Cairo took the initiative of bringing the group to visit five top universities in Portugal in 2018. Thereafter a high-level delegation of NOVA visited Cairo on March 11, 2019, where it met the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Development, the Parliamentary Commission for higher education, and the representative of the rectors of the Egyptian universities. The high-level reception in Egypt compares very impressively with the Chinese case, where only local municipal authorities and second-rank representatives of the University received NOVA.

State Impositions

In China the decision to accept and implement a transnational campus is conditioned by the 2003 *Regulation of the People's Republic of*

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China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (Huang, 2008), and implies that the central authorities in Beijing approve the initiative of the state government. Those initiatives, on the other hand, are based on the wishes of municipality authorities for their local development plans, in a sequence of hierarchical authorizations.

According to the above regulations, a NOVA campus in the region of Chengdu may operate only in partnership with a regional Chinese University, in this case (a university in Sichuan province), provided that the Chinese government authorizes the request for the opening of such a campus – submitted by the Chinese partner, and with the support of the regional authorities. The requirement for partnership with a Chinese university is the warrant of quality under the Chinese perspective. The programs offered under this partnership will award a Euro-Chinese degree, to be accredited by the Chinese agency (Huang, 2008).

In Egypt, the implementation of foreign university campuses is regulated by the International Branch Campuses Act, ratified in 2018, according to which the curricular structure must progress through a sequence of hierarchical state approvals (Lane, 2018), until the Campus operation receives a final Presidential decree that establishes the permission to operate.

The requirements impose that the curricular structure be exactly the same as the one offered in Europe, and that the programs offered in Egypt have the same European accreditation as those offered at the mother university. In the Portuguese case, the requirements of the national accreditation agency impose that at least two thirds of the faculty have direct affiliation to the mother university in Portugal. A campus in Cairo will thus help, by construction, in the

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internationalization ratios of the European mother institution, whereas in China the requirements would not take into account these particular interests of the European counterpart.

Findings

The campuses' business models

We now discuss the business model for the two cases. We start with the financing and then examine the impact on the pedagogical models (teaching vs. research) and the value creation philosophies.

Financing

In the case of China all the financial metrics, such as CAPEX (Capital Expenditures) and OPEX (Operational Expenditures) for the operation will be covered by the local investor. Whenever the NOVA campus operation is approved, as it starts operations it will provide NOVA a proportion of the returns that are to be shared with the local Chinese academic partner, and with the local investor.

In Egypt, as in China, all the CAPEX and OPEX for the operation will be covered by the local investor, TKH. The proposed cooperating university is already operating in various areas including informatics, design, and accounting. NOVA will start with five undergraduate programs in areas related to Management and Technology.

In the cases described above the financing model implies that all the OPEX are the responsibility of the local investors. This means that these investors are looking for a return on their investment, leading to a natural incentive to reduce costs as much as possible. The trade-off here is to understand what the critical point is where costs compromise

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the offering quality of the universities service: when does a research university program start looking like a teaching university offer?

The approach: teaching vs. research

The financing model described above has strategic implications. When establishing a campus overseas there are two different types of western universities: research-based or teaching-based. In Asia, as well as in the Middle East, the financing models described above are seeking to leverage on the western university's reputation. Reputations of universities as reflected in the rankings, however, are based on the capacity of higher education institutions to deliver a quality service on their three missions: knowledge generation, knowledge-based education, and knowledge-based value transfer to society. Providing quality services in these three components is costly, and this cost is reflected in the qualifications of the faculty and staff involved.

In the Chinese model, the association to a local top university seems to guarantee the scientific/scholarly reputation of the underlying western university. In the Egyptian case the guarantee of quality is driven via the European accreditation system and the overall reputation brought by the rankings and other related international accreditations. The question is whether the economic incentives underlying the financing model allow for the offer of the exact same quality of services for the program offer in spite of the curricula and accreditation.

On the other hand, China and Egypt are very different cases, in the sense that China has been implementing international campuses for a considerable time. According to Huang (2015), China has implemented effective national strategies in order to form its world-class research universities, characterized by a top-down policy as opposed to the

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European and North American cases. This occurs with increasing funding from both the central government and from local authorities associated with a few elite universities. However, there is still a long way to go for China to play its desired influential role, as the Chinese system still systematically compares to the Western international ranking systems and uses the Western best practices as their benchmark (Yang, 2014, and Huang, 2015).

Egypt, on the other hand, is initiating in only the last few years a process of introducing international branches (with a few exceptions of long-established campuses such as the American University in Cairo – AUC and the German University in Cairo – GUC). At this stage, with the initial investment made, the only possible expectation is to start with high quality teaching institutions, to further develop a resident faculty with research capacity in the long run. Expectations are high, but the impact of international branches in Egypt is not yet understood (Bola, 2020). Some stakeholders hope that these transnational ventures will create momentum in the Egyptian higher education system, improving access, and encouraging quality through competitiveness. Other stakeholders, however, argue that transnational education may be perceived as exclusive to an elite, and that pedagogical and cultural barriers will prevent it from adequately integrating with the higher education sector. Only time will allow a fair evaluation.

Socioeconomic value creation

In China the undergraduate programs are four years long. The demand for curricula is strongly concentrated in science and technology, and should not be focused in a pure management degree – there are too many foreign universities offering this type of training but with no clear impact in local and regional development. The idea

suggested by NOVA to implement its educational offer in a future China campus is simple and implies offering four-year interdisciplinary programs, each of which involving two different schools within the university. For example, a student could follow the three-year undergraduate program in management from Nova School of Business and Economics and then follow classes with the curriculum of the first year of the Master in Health Management from NOVA's Public Health School. At the end, the candidate would have completed four years of study that would provide a Chinese undergraduate degree in Health Management. In the sequence, the Chinese student could apply to a 3-year master's degree in China.

However, having already done the first year of studies of a NOVA master degree, such students could be automatically admitted to the respective two-year Masters at NOVA, for which the first curricular year has already thus been completed, allowing them to finish the NOVA Master degree program in only one additional year. This model applies to several possible combinations, such as data science and informatics, or biotechnology and chemistry, among many others).

In Egypt, from the tuition fee paid by students in Cairo, NOVA receives 10%, but if a student decides to spend a period overseas at NOVA, there is a tuition rebate. The principle is that students should pay 90% of the tuition to the campus where they are benefitting from facilities, faculty, and local staff, and 10% to the sister campus. In its 4-year study program (already operating) NOVA includes a foundation year to bring credibility to the recruiting system, levelling, adapting, and integrating students into the European education mechanism, followed by the traditional 3-year undergraduate curricular structure.

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The model creates an incentive for NOVA to attract students to spend a period in Lisbon, possibly a semester, preferably a full year. This incentive must be dealt with carefully, as it is in NOVA's best interest that the Cairo campus remain sustainable at the financial and operational level. In spite of the exchange dynamics between the Lisbon and Cairo campus, there is a significant recruiting potential of the top graduates from the Cairo campus to follow up their studies at the Lisbon campus for the master degree.

Paradoxical challenges in the development of international campuses

Universities have a number of roles in international relations. We mentioned three of these goals: as developers of human capital, as mechanisms of soft power, and as tools for international cooperation and resource attraction. We next discuss these three roles, which are also goals, and their paradoxical relationships regarding the two cases explored here (see Table 1). We contribute to the literature by uncovering the paradoxical tensions involved in the development of transnational campuses, as different logics are involved (education, business, international relations). We treat paradox as the persisting presence of mutually defining oppositions (Berti et al. 2021; Smith & Lewis, 2011). In this sense, paradox refers to the fact that complex and pluralistic organizations such as universities with their hybrid logics (educational and commercial), in which different interests and agendas coexist, are necessarily characterized by tension and the need to accommodate different points of view. In other words, they need to think paradoxically (Smith & Cunha, 2020). The relationship between the three goals of the transnational campuses is thus necessarily characterized by these paradoxical tensions, whose management can

produce more synergies or more tradeoffs (Li, 2016). Synergy and tradeoff coexist in paradox and the way paradoxes are tackled may create more of the first (when managed through a both-and approach; see Smith et al., 2016) or the latter (when approached as either-or types of problems). We now elaborate the three goals and subsequently consider the benefits from treating them with a paradox lens.

Developers of human capital. A critical function of the university is the development of human capital, the stock of skills possessed by the labor force (Goldin, 2016). The two projects share this goal, leveraging on the use of established European institutions to increase the skillset of their students. They differ in the following way: whereas China aims to train their graduates within the Chinese ideological system in hard technical competences, thereby being able to compete with Western top universities, Egypt is striving for more flexible graduates who may use their knowledge to adapt to the future (open) job market.

Yang (2014) considers four features as mechanisms for the internationalization in Chinese higher education and how they affect the actors involved: (a) the increasing role of English language as a criterion for academic excellence, (b) the focus on hard sciences, which are more objective and easier to communicate in their language, as opposed to social sciences and humanities, due to the "varied ideologies, paradigms, and discourses inherent in the humanities and social sciences and the high dependency on language to convey their meanings" (Yang & Yeung, 2015, p.20), (c) the concern with the potential loss of educational sovereignty, implying a policy that requires foreign universities to partner with Chinese institutions, and also impose governance restrictions, and (d) the impact of a homogeneous, centralized system applied to a landscape of

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universities in China that is heterogeneous, in which only the top universities are becoming truly internationalized.

For Egypt, internationalizing is a recent process. Traditional Egyptian universities are already based on the Western model and accept the challenge to develop mass education for an increasing demand, driving close cooperation with foreign institutions (Adel *et al*., 2018). The launching of international branches aims to initially develop high quality teaching institutions in order to: (a) develop a resident faculty with research capacity in the long run, (b) increase the number of students by 50 percent – national and international, and (c) develop a better fit between the educational offer and the increasingly flexible requirements of the labor market (Lane 2018), as the employability of higher education graduates in Egypt has been a well-identified problem (Abou-Setta, 2014).

Mechanisms of soft power. Universities can be regarded as tools of soft power, the capacity to influence others without coercion or imposition, through attraction (Nye, 2004, 2008). In this case Portuguese players seek to establish their reputation as important international partners in the higher education setting. Attractive universities may help to establish a country's reputation and institutional strength (Porter, 2021), as well as cosmopolitan ethos, in addition to securing income. For the Chinese and Egyptian players there are also soft power issues involved such as communicating an open and cosmopolitan ethos. China and Egypt differ in this regard in the following way, however: whereas China aims to become a recognized global power in knowledge creation and transfer, Egypt expects that the implementation of international branches may work as public

diplomacy, accelerating the relationships with Europe and North America.

Yang (2012) approaches the soft power of the Chinese higher education policy from the perspective of international power relations. He discusses how Chinese higher education institutions have developed a new distinctive model of international exchange and cooperation in higher education, whereby China wants its top universities to become good universities in the world and invests heavily in its top universities, aiming for an influential role in the global system of higher education; while educating talents for the job market remains a main aim. However, as pointed out by Yang (2014) and Huang (2015), while the Chinese system still systematically compares itself to the western best practices and benchmarks, there is still a long way to go for China to play its desired influential role.

In the Egyptian case, the expectation of the government is that international branch campuses may work as catalysts for future relationships with developed regions such as Europe and North America. A stressed by Lane (2018), such international branches may be used to strengthen geopolitical relationships and be a basis for recruiting other forms of investment. International branches may create cultural and physical links between two different regions, becoming a new form of public diplomacy.

Tools for international cooperation. Universities constitute important diplomatic tools (Metzgar, 2016). Institutions such as the Chinese Confucius Institutes and the Portuguese Instituto Camões illustrate this (Chey, 2008). Our cases illustrate this, as they involve the universities as well as governments and diplomats. The cooperation involves important challenges for leaders as it contains tensions, such

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as between centralization and decentralization at various levels (governments, universities, schools, accreditation bodies). The management of tensions is a common issue in academic leadership (Bush, 2016) as well as in leadership and organizations in general (Cunha et al., 2021), but the number of stakeholders involved raises the challenges of tension management to new levels.

According to Frezghi and Tsegay (2019), the process of higher education internationalization in China is highly centered in the government, leveraging on financial and diplomatic advantages. The government greatly influences higher education institutions through regulations, financing, planning, and evaluation. Additionally, the authors provide evidence that internationalization of higher education in China is providing the country with economic and cultural capital.

According to Lane (2018) the Egyptian government set an agenda for higher education, according to which internationalization will have a main role, implying (a) private institutions to partner with highly ranked foreign partners, (b) improving quality through importation of accreditation processes, (c) increasing by 50 percent the number of international students, and (d) aligning the academic offer with the changing market demands. Through these interactions the government expects to obtain a greater number of higher education institutions ranked in the top 500 worldwide, thus attracting more and better students.

Discussion

Returning to our main research question (i.e., *how can different transnational campus models reach their plural and potentially contradictory goals?*), we conclude that different campuses are vehicles for different

objectives (Table 1): whereas in China the goal is to increase economic competitiveness and strengthen the economic status of the country, in Egypt these goals are also present in the official speeches, but are less visible on the horizon. The primary goal of the Egyptian Government is to use the internationalization of the educational reform as a means to fight extremism and to control the brain drain. Regarding talent leader development, in China the goal consists of the capacitation of talent leaders aligned with the system and with strong technological skills, whereas Egypt aims to develop talents leaders aligned with the vision of creating a more open society, free from extremism.

For the European universities involved some objectives are common such as reinforcing international presence and status as well as increasing their influence abroad as a form of soft power (Wojciuk, 2018; Wojciuk et al., 2015). In the EU, the ability to deliver higher education across borders became the norm for national states (Brandenburger et al., 2013), a factor that partly explains the concerted effort of the state in supporting these projects. For the partnering universities, this management effort involves the preparation of administrators with proper managerial and cross-cultural credentials, which could be a challenge (Webber, 2016; Webber & Okoko, 2021).

Table 1. Goals of transnational campus in China and Egypt

China campus	Egypt campus

International cooperation	Chinese education competitiveness	Improve society to fight extremism
	Recognized educational power	Increase training quality
	Attract and develop talent	Control brain drain
	Technological capacitation	Develop local research capacity
	Help develop mass education	Increase # of students by 50%
Soft power	Increase # of universities in top 100	Increase # of universities in top 500
	Increase publications in top global journals	Increase in applied research
		Increase in the number of graduates
Human capital development	Develop talents aligned with the system and with strong technological capacities	Develops talents aligned with the change of the system, building a more open society

Contributions and implications

We contribute to the discussion of the transnational campus as a paradoxical journey. The three goals of developing human capital,

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cooperating internationally, and projecting soft power, introduce a number of paradoxical tensions that may be valid beyond the boundaries of our two cases, an avenue to be further investigated elsewhere. We highlight three paradoxical tensions: opening up while seeking protection from undesired influence, human development as ideological influence, and search for development that stimulates soft forms of power.

First, there is tension between opening up while seeking protection from undesired influence. Openness to foreign universities may create tension between the liberal ideas of the West and the local ideas and ideologies. This is not exempt from tensions regarding how foreign and local ideas and traditions meet one another. The desire to open up while protecting local modes of thinking involves a paradoxical need to search for an acceptable balance between openness and closure. This balance requires an effort of adjustment from both parties as well as a pragmatic understanding of the different realities involved.

Second, there are paradoxes involving human development as capacitation and ideological influence. On the one hand the transnational campus aims to increase the capacitation of students. Higher education serves to transmit an educational curriculum and the related technical core. But there is necessarily an ideological subtext permeating the technical core, as every management theory reflects a given understanding of the world, an ideology (Guillén, 1994). When a management curriculum is taught in a different context, there are layers of meaning that need to be articulated and that necessarily involve some contradictory elements (Cunha & Cunha, 2008).

Finally, there is the search for development that stimulates softer forms of power. But this soft influence, to close the circle, can be perceived as

a source of covert undesired influence from outside cultures and managerial ideologies. Research suggests that management models can be exported (Djelic, 1998). On the other hand, however, soft power may amount to a form of intercultural negotiation that encourages peace through education, which, as we will discuss next, constitutes a possible avenue for future research. As Figure 2 graphically depicts, human development may convey ideology through management theory; management theory may be a vehicle of soft power, which may in turn be a form of external interference. For these reasons, the transnational campus is both an educational and a political endeavor, and the articulation of these dimensions, with their respective contradictions, requires paradoxical competences from the managers in both the educational and the political side. It may also benefit from a paradoxical way of thinking from the parties involved.
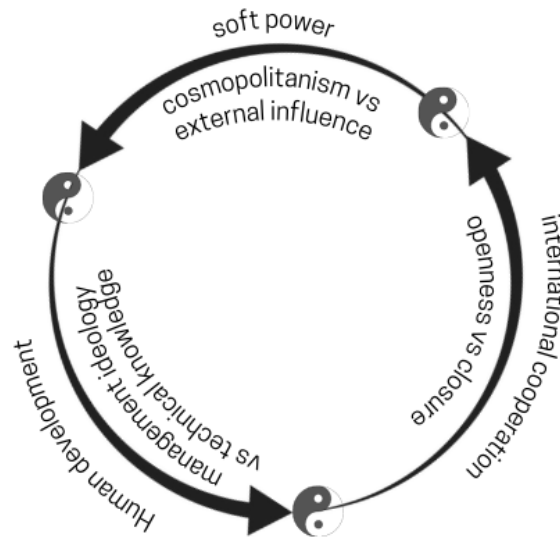
Figure 2. Three dimensions of the transnational campus

Our contrasting cases suggest that the transnational campus works as a multi-purpose vehicle, including but not limited to the development of human capital. Transnational campuses can be adopted to promote the acquisition of hard skills or as tools to create the educational infrastructure to nurture more democratic institutions and to fight extremism.

We thus stress the important role of universities and international partnerships not only in terms of the development of human capital but also as a form of diplomacy and soft power. In addition to peace through commerce initiatives (e.g., Westermann-Behaylo et al., 2015),

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international university collaborations such as those we have discussed may promote cultural and cosmopolitan capital (e.g., Nam & Jiang, 2021), important attributes for higher education development in a global world.

Limitations and future research

The study is limited by the fact that it involves a limited number of cases that makes generalization difficult. Case studies are not intended for statistical generalization but even theoretical generalization should be conducted with care. The process of creating international campuses involves important political dimensions that may also limit the value of theoretical transference to other settings. Yet there is promise in the study of the topic as well as important avenues for future research, namely the role of higher education in the promotion of peace. Previous work considered peace through commerce (e.g., Trivedi, 2016), with its capacity to promote the diffusion of shared practices and mindsets (Spreitzer, 2007) as well as peace through tourism (Levy & Hawkins, 2009). Scholars might explore peace through study and education and in particular the role of transnational campuses in this process. The role of peace through education has been discussed (Lauritzen, 2016) but there is space to explore peace through business education, as a pragmatic approach to combine the spheres of business, education, and government. We invite scholars to operationalize peace through study and academic training, namely in the transnational campus.

Conclusion

We have discussed the transformational role of international university campuses and their respective challenges. Very often in the

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past the Western perspective has been commercial, and these branches were represented as a source of revenues, either via tuition fees, or through the power to capture talent. The process involves tensions and paradoxical choices: the development of transnational campus constitutes a paradoxical journey, the success of which depends on how the tensions between goals are tackled and synergies obtained – or not. These considerations set the limits for cooperation in both cases, far beyond the original commercial perspective. In Egypt there is a moral responsibility of helping to build a more sustainable society from inside via education, whereas in China it is the role of Western campuses to accept the effort by the Chinese institutions, discussed by Yang (2014), to embrace the Western way of making science ultimately reflected in the way the rankings are accepted and used as a benchmark in that country. The tradeoffs between the benefits expected from cooperation and the circumstantial, political and cultural obstacles are the key ingredients that will help designing adequate policies and strategies in order to optimize cooperation and will allow to overcome the paradoxical tensions described above. Overall, what defines the transnational campus is the power of the university to allow cultures to dialogue around contradictory interests and to integrate national interests under a logic of collaborative knowledge creation-diffusion. The transnational campus can thus be represented as a force for international collaboration geared toward the development of human talent and exportation of higher education, participating in the construction of more cosmopolitan societies, or as a positive expression of politics by other means.

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