

Report

on the first case study fact-finding mission to China

(April 7–18, 2025)

Background and goals

Between April 8 and April 18, 2025 a fact-finding mission was made in China supporting the preparation of a case study as planned in the work plan of the project titled “*University-industry integration policies and practices in China - potential applications in Hungary*”. This project is funded by the Hungarian government and it is hosted and implemented by *Wekerle Business School* (WBS) in cooperation with *Mathias Corvinus College* (MCC). The mission was undertaken by the professional leader of the project (prof. dr. Gábor HALÁSZ) and the project research assistant (Mrs Min HUANG), who are also the authors of this report. The cities visited were Shenzhen and Guangzhou in the southern Guangdong province of China.

This fact-finding mission was linked with prof. Halász’s invitation by Shenzhen University (SZU) as a keynote speaker of an international conference on “phenomenological pedagogy” to speak about how the phenomenological approach can be used to analyse the impact of university-industry cooperation on university faculty.¹ The connection of the fact-finding mission with this conference invitation has had a practical and also a conceptual advantage: (1) it provided a significant reduction of costs (travel and accommodation expenses for dr. Halász and partial accommodation expenses for Mrs. Huang were covered by SZU), (2) it provided a new analytical perspective to study the university-industry integration (UII) phenomenon.

The goal of the mission was collecting data on UII policies and practices in Shenzhen and the Greater Bay Area (GBA).² The city of Shenzhen was selected as the main target area of the first UII case study because of its unique context: universities (most of them very young institutions) here are connected with companies that are using highly advanced technologies and are competing on global markets at the higher end of production chains, which require sophisticated and advanced skills. These skills can be produced only through a particularly deep and intensive cooperation between universities and industry, as without the active support of them learning environments that can develop the relevant skills appropriately cannot be created. The young universities are particularly open to innovative ways to organise teaching and learning which creates a favourable environment for the pedagogical and institutional innovations required by the practice of UII.

¹ International Conference on "Phenomenological Pedagogy (ICPP): Towards a Thoughtful Pedagogy" (April 11-14, 2025). The title of the lecture: “Phenomenological Pedagogy and University-Industry Cooperation: A Faculty-Centred Perspective on Bridging Education and Industrial Practice” (see [here](#))

² The Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area, the largest and most populated urban area in the world, is envisioned by Chinese government as an integrated economic area aimed at taking a leading role globally in the next decade. This area is the home of the majority of China's most innovative technology companies (such as Huawei, ZTE, DJI, BYD, GAC Group, and Tencent) and it produces about 10 percent of China’s GDP.

Organisation of the mission

The mission was preceded by an intensive exploration of the development and current state of higher education in Shenzhen and Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong province and in the GBA. A large amount of relevant policy documents and related publications have been accumulated and studied before the field visit. Several leading universities and experts have been contacted, and the details of the program of visit have been negotiated in advance through online communication.

In Shenzhen and Guangzhou we visited five universities,³ three specialised research institutes and met several experts (the list of the persons we met and institutions we visited is provided in Annex 1; and the program schedule is presented in Annex 2). Our local partners have been very receptive, they were willing to support our mission with sharing relevant information and to help us understand the complex phenomenon of UII policy in general, and the specific context of UII policy in the GBA.

The information acquired through face-to-face meetings during the mission, together with the documents previously accumulated or collected also during the visits, has provided sufficient foundation to prepare the first case study.

Outcomes

The main outcome of the mission is the data collected for the Shenzhen case study, but there are also further outcomes. First, a deeper understanding of China's UII policy and practices which can be used to further develop the conceptual and theoretical framework of our project. Second, a rich network of professional contacts was established (see Annex 1). This network can be used in the future for different purposes, such as, for example, testing various hypotheses (requesting our partners to confirm them) or initiating institutional partnerships with Hungarian universities (which is one of the goals of our project). Third, on the basis of the data collected during the mission some preliminary conclusions can also be formulated (see the next section).

A further important outcome is related to WBS: during the fact-finding mission several partners expressed their interest in cooperating with this Chinese owned central European university operating in a Belt and Road country. This was explicitly expressed, by the vice-director of the international affairs department of SZPU, a leading professor at the business school of SZPU, the vice-dean of the business school of SCNU, a leading professor of the business school of SUST and the vice-director of a company owned by SCNU (doing research on industrial innovation in the GBA). These partners expressed their willingness to support WBS in achieving its strategic goals of upgrading its status and reputation.

The mission yielded important outcomes also for MCC. The information collected can enrich the "Learning from Asia" project of MCC in an important area where China can share valuable experiences with Hungary and the West. During the mission the project was presented to several of our partners and seven copies of the book titled "Learning from Asia in education" were handed over to our partners. Several of our partners expressed their interest for the project, especially researchers at SZU and SCNU.

³ Shenzhen Polytechnic University (SZPU), Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech), Shenzhen University (SZU); South China Normal University (SCNU) and South China University of Technology (SCUT).

Preliminary conclusions

Although the writing of the case study only started, a few preliminary conclusions can already be formulated on the basis this mission:

- The Chinese policy of UII is in an intensive phase of implementation. This is an unquestioned and strong component of the Chinese economic modernisation strategy based on the idea of innovation-driven economic development. Local institutional leaders are aware of this policy and they are actively creating the new institutional environment in which university education and industrial production can effectively be integrated. Although the realisation of integration of education and industrial production (creating new symbiotic entities from two very different worlds) is extremely challenging, the implementation process seems to be much smoother than one could expect. This seems to prove that integration is difficult but it is possible.
- There is an emerging and evolving body of conceptual and theoretical knowledge of UII which is permanently enriched by the experiences accumulated during the implementation process and is providing a sound basis for designing and improving the policy and supporting implementation and local practices. Although many elements of the emerging conceptual and theoretical framework originated in well-known Western frameworks (such as the Triple Helix, and the Knowledge Triangle) it goes far beyond them and now one can talk about an original Chinese model based on advanced “ecosystems thinking” where education, skills development, industrial production and industrial innovation are strongly and deeply connected not only institutionally but also conceptually.
- The understanding of China’s UII policies and practices require not only the studying of original Chinese policy documents and publications but also cognitive efforts, especially for Western observers. The meaning of the terms used in the related policy discourse is often distorted by the English translations. This can be illustrated, among others, by the term university-industry integration itself: in the original Chinese term “产学研融合” (Chǎn xué róng hé) the characters “融合” also mean „fusion,” “blending,” or “merging”, which has stronger connotations than “integration”. Behind many of the Chinese terms there is a longer history of intellectual debates leading to conceptual innovations which have a significant impact on the way policies are conceived, interpreted and implemented.
- There are great regional/local differences in the way UII policy is implemented in China, and this diversity is deliberately encouraged by the national government. Local actors (provincial and municipal governments, universities and companies, think tanks) actively initiate context specific, bottom-up solutions which result in a surprisingly decentralised and diverse policy mechanism (in contrast with several other policy areas). This challenges – at least in the specific area of UII policy – the dominant Western view describing governance in China as highly centralised. We can observe an interesting combination of sectoral (vertical) and territorial/regional (horizontal) approaches, the latter being particularly strong in this policy area.
- There are specific developments in Shenzhen and the GBA which makes this geographical area different from other areas, due several factors, especially to the specific historical/political conditions (the experience of policy experimentation in the experimental zones, the connectedness to global economy, the strong involvement of

Hong Kong based actors etc) and the high level concentration of high-tech companies and advanced service industry. As a consequence we can identify a specific Shenzhen model of UII. A key element of this model is that it is led by industry (especially high-tech industry), many initiatives coming from industrial leaders fully aware of the importance of human resource for global competitiveness.

- The level of integration seem to be higher in the more recently established, extremely dynamic universities of Shenzhen than in the older and often more traditional universities of the provincial capital, Guangzhou. The example of Shenzhen universities (especially SUSTech) shows that a new university can develop into a leading global institution in a very short period of time, using progressive pedagogy and being open to the world of industry, in case sufficient financial and political support is assured.
- There is a striking difference between traditional comprehensive or research universities and technical universities (TUs) although the latter institutions are also developing into advanced knowledge creation entities capable not only to develop high level skills and also to contribute to research and industrial innovation. The penetration of industry is stronger in the TU sector than in the more traditional comprehensive or research university sector (see the example of so called “industry colleges” in TU institutions).
- Although local analysers often mention implementation monitoring, evaluation and policy impact assessment as the weak elements of UII policy, we could observe intensive activities also in this areas. There are many research projects aimed at analysing the implementation of UII policy, and many project contain strong monitoring, evaluation and policy impact assessment components. This is enhancing policy learning and directly contributes to the development of the conceptual-theoretical foundations of the UII policy as mentioned above. UII policy can be described as a knowledge-intensive policy were experimentation is combined with feedback and continuous learning.
- On the basis of our first case study – which is in the stage of data analysis – it is already possible to formulate some relevant conclusion for Hungary. One of these is that those elements of the Hungarian HE development strategy that enhance university-industry cooperation (e.g. dual training and the establishment of units responsible for UIC in HE institutions) could be developed into a coherent and advanced UIC model using the Chinese experiences. Another conclusion is that design of a coherent and advanced UIC policy model requires strong conceptual and theoretical foundations and Chinese model could provide valuable input to this.

Budapest, 2025.04.19

ANNEX 1: List of persons met and institutions visited

Name	City	University/position
1. LI Shùyīng (李树英).	Shenzhen	SZU (Director, Education Research Institute)
2. WEI Hang (魏航)	Shenzhen	SZU (Education Research Institute)
3. Li Jun (李均)	Shenzhen	SZU (Director, Institute of Higher Education) ⁴
4. XU Jianling (许建领)	Shenzhen	SZPU (President) ⁵
5. WANG Bingfeng (王冰峰)	Shenzhen	SZPU (Head, international office) ⁶
6. LI Simin (李斯敏) (Jasmin)	Shenzhen	SZPU (international office)
7. LIN Qianmin (林倩敏)	Shenzhen	SZPU / UNESCO TVET centre
8. YANG Congkun (杨从坤)	Shenzhen	SZPU (Deputy Director of the International Office) / UNESCO-UNEVOC
9. ZHOU Yue Rong (周月容)	Shenzhen	SZPU (Vice Dean of Business school)
10. SHEN Hong (沈红)	Shenzhen	SUSTech (Head, Centre for Higher Education Research)
11. LIU Xu (刘绪)	Shenzhen	SUSTech (Centre for Higher Education Research)
12. ZHOU Jingyi (周婧怡)	Shenzhen	UNESCO (International Centre for Higher Education Innovation)
13. SU Rui (苏睿)	Shenzhen	UNESCO (International Centre for Higher Education Innovation)
14. CHENG Xin (程鑫)	Shenzhen	SUSTech (Professor, Executive Dean, National Graduate College for Engineers)
15. MA Yongsheng (马永胜)	Shenzhen	SUSTech (Professor, Mechanical and Energy Engineering)
16. MA Zhaoyuan (马兆远)	Shenzhen	SUSTech (Professor, College of Business)
17. LI Xu (李旭)	Shenzhen	SUSTech (Associate Dean, School of Design)
18. KANG Le (康乐)	Shenzhen	SUSTech (Research Associate Professor, Centre for Higher Edu. Research)
19. LI Changkui (李昌奎)	Shenzhen /Hong Kong	Kaiyuan Education Technology Ltd
20. ZHUANG Hui Juan(庄慧娟)	Guangzhou	SCNU (Vice-dean of school of international Business)
21. ZHANG Youliang (张优良)	Guangzhou	SCNU (Vice-dean of Faculty of Teacher Training)
22. WANG Hong (王红)	Guangzhou	SCNU (Dean, Faculty of Education)
23. JIANG Linhao (蒋林浩)	Guangzhou	SCNU (Science and Technology Innovation Research Institute)
24. XIU Qi (修旗)	Guangzhou	SCNU (Associate professor of Faculty of Education)
25. CHEN Dongmei (陈冬梅)	Guangzhou	SCNU (Head, Institute of Education and Science)
26. XIE Ailei (谢爱磊)	Guangzhou	SCNU (assistant)
27. WANG Yingmi (王应密)	Guangzhou	SCUT (Vice-director, Institute of Higher Education)
28. HU Dongzhe (胡东哲)	Guangzhou	SUST (postgraduate student)
29. ZHAO Zhengang (赵振刚)	Guangzhou	SCNU (Professor, School of Food Industry)

⁴ Due to program organisation issues we could not meet professor Liu. We agreed to have an online interview with him after our return to Hungary.

⁵ We could not have face-to-face meeting with professor Xu (Prof. Halász met him earlier in Beijing).

⁶ Mr. Wang coordinated our program at SZPU, we did not have face-to-face meeting with him.

ANNEX 2: The program of the mission

April 7	Monday	Budapest	Departure
April 8	Tuesday	Shenzhen	Program coordination, preparing meetings
April 9	Wednesday	Shenzhen	Visiting SZPU and UNESCO TVET research centre
April 10	Thursday	Shenzhen	Visiting SUSTech, attending seminar on UII (with lecturing on EU UIC policies), meeting with local entrepreneur
April 11	Friday	Shenzhen	Visiting workshops in SZU, meeting SZU leaders at welcome dinner
April 12	Saturday	Shenzhen	Conference participation at SZU, conversations with SZU researchers
April 13	Sunday	Shenzhen	Conference participation at SZU (lecturing on UIC), data analysis, visiting Shenzhen districts
April 14	Monday	Shenzhen	Data analysis, program coordination, online interview with SCNU researcher
April 15	Tuesday	Guangzhou	Travel to Guangzhou, lecture at SCNU, dinner with SCNU researchers
April 16	Wednesday	Guangzhou	Meeting with SCNU leaders, meeting with SCNU UIC research centre leader, visiting SCUT
April 17	Thursday	Shenzhen	Lecturing at SZU (EU education policies) and departure to airport
April 18	Friday	Shenzhen/Budapest	Arrival to Budapest