Migration, Quality Assurance, and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications

A Country Paper of the People’s Republic of China

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Abstract

This paper is a country paper on the issue of migration, quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications, which is mainly based on official regulations, relevant studies, and reports.

This paper starts with a brief introduction that expansion of higher education systems worldwide and the increasing number of cross-border mobile students has become the major characteristics in the development of higher education in the past decade in the world. The implementation of WTO/GATS is one of the factors behind the expansion of cross-border mobile students. On the other hand, UNESCO has responded timely with a number of initiatives that aimed to provide international or regional framework for facilitating mutual recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education between different countries and quality assurance of cross-border higher education. In the case of China, higher education system has also been experiencing quantitative expansion in the past decade with quality measures and university capacity building projects being introduced at the same time to support the expansion of the system. Due to China’s entry into WTO, as well as its active involvement in the regional convention on mutual recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education, its higher education system has been more internationalized with more student and professional mobility both inwards and outwards.

The first part of the paper tries to provide context of issues related to the migration, quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications in China, including China’s higher education degrees and diplomas system, quality assurance systems, regulations on the access to professional and vocational jobs, and the regulations on foreign citizens working in China. It is clear that in China there are three types of higher education degrees and diplomas: academic degrees, professional degrees and higher vocational diplomas with each having its own quality regulating system and evaluation agency. The government has introduced professional and vocational qualification systems for people who want access to professional or skill-based vocational occupations. There are also government regulations on foreign citizens working in China, in which a number of official procedures and requirements concerning the candidates’ education and professional qualifications and working experience are defined.

The second part of the paper deals with the professional examination and registration systems in selected professions in China, including these in medicine, nursing, architecture, accounting and law. Education and working experience requirements, professional examinations, and professional registration or licensing are specified for each of the selected professional titles. It is observed that the regulations on the entry of professional occupations are well established in China with different regulating authorities, examination agencies, and registration or licensing organizations.

The third part of the paper examines examples of international agreements on mutual recognition of higher education qualifications China has signed with foreign countries. The main features of bilateral agreement with the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Russia Federation have been analyzed. It is founded that all these bilateral agreements are designed to simplify the procedures of mutual recognition of higher
education qualifications by identifying the equivalence of studies, degrees and diplomas of both countries. The purpose of the mutual recognition of qualifications is largely to facilitate students going to other countries for further studies. Foreign studies and degrees should also be validated by designated organization before they could be used for the purposes of further studies or employment in China. Professional accreditations are currently still at pilot stage in China. However, efforts have already been made in architectural education and engineering education to promote mutual recognition of professional accreditations in the last couple of years. China has signed Canberra Accord concerning the mutual recognition of architectural education and is preparing to apply for provisional status of Washington Accord, an international agreement on the mutual recognition of engineering accreditation.

The paper concludes with some reflections on the future policy orientations. First, with the expansion of China’s higher education system, more professional education programs rather than traditional academic programs could be introduced into traditional universities so that the universities could be more responsive to the changing needs of the employment market and therefore increase the employability of their graduates. Secondly, more professional accreditation systems could be encouraged by the government with professional accreditation bodies taking the major roles. Thirdly, the government could strengthen links between national human resource development planning and the identification of priority areas for mutual recognition of professional accreditations. Finally, Capacity building is needed at national and organizational levels to get China more integrated into the international academic and professional communities with comparable and transparent systems of professional accreditation.
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Introduction

The past decade has seen tremendous changes in the development of higher education in the world, among which the expansion of higher education systems worldwide and increasing number of cross-border mobile students could be seen as major phenomena that have been attracting the attention of international communities and policy makers of both sending and receiving countries. At an international level, the major impetus for the expansion of cross-border mobile students comes from the implementation of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) under the WTO framework, which focuses on further liberalization of trade in services, including higher education. On the other hand, as an inter-governmental organization with mandate for education under the UN umbrella, UNESCO has also responded timely to this important development by implementing six regional conventions on the recognition of studies, diplomas, and degrees, and launching World Forum on International Quality Assurance and Accreditation and elaborating Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education (UNESCO, 2005) in cooperation with OECD.

As the largest developing country, China could not escape from these changes. Before 1999, the higher education system in China was essentially an elite system with gross enrollment ratio well below 10% (Wang, 2006). The purpose of higher education was mainly to provide qualified government personnel and most of the university graduates would be assigned jobs in the public sector. The year 1998 could be seen as a milestone for the development of Chinese higher education when the Chinese government officially launched new policies on higher education, which started a decade of expansion of higher education in this country. According to official statistics, the gross enrollment ratio started from 9% in 1998 to 23% in 2007 (MOE, 1999, 2007). Higher education enrollment has risen from 6.23 million in 1998 to 27 million in 2007, which made China the largest higher education system in the world.

Apart from the quantitative expansion, the Chinese government has also taken measures to ensure that the quality dimension of the system could be enhanced. In 2003, a Quinquennial National Teaching Evaluation Exercise (QNTEE) was introduced with a set of benchmarking indicators established for universities and colleges to refer to when they conduct activities for self-improvement. At the same time, the Chinese government launched two university capacity building projects, namely ‘211 project’ and ‘985 project’, by which selected Chinese top universities could get more financial inputs from government and non-government sources to improve their institutional infrastructure and attract more international leading scholars.

Coinciding with China’s policy of opening to the outside world, Chinese higher education system has become more internationalized in the past decade. Great efforts
have been made by the Chinese government to get the country more integrated into the international academic communities and UNESCO and WTO/GATS have been regarded as the two major platforms to achieve this purpose. For example, China is among the countries to ratify the *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific* and has taken legislative action to allow foreign higher education providers to operate in the country as a result of its partial commitments under the framework of WTO/GATS. By 2008, China has signed bilateral agreements on mutual recognition of studies, diplomas, and degrees in higher education with 22 foreign countries (MOE, 2008).

During the last decade, China has seen increasing student and professional mobility both inward and outward. According to official statistics, the number of outgoing students reached 133,800 in 2006, more than eight times increase compared with the figure of 17,622 in 1998. The number of international students studying in Chinese colleges and universities in 2006 is 162,659, also a huge increase compared with the figure of 43,084 in 1998 (MOE, 1999, 2007). At the same time, more foreign citizens came to work in China. At the end of 2006, the number of foreign citizens working in China with official work permit reached 180,000 and the figure increased to 210,000 in 2007 (MOLSS & NBSC, 2007, 2008).

This paper tries to identify the contexts of issues concerning the migration, quality assurance, and mutual recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in China, present examination and registration system in selected professions in China, examine the selected cases of China’s bilateral agreement on the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications, and conclude with some remarks and recommendations for the future policy orientations concerning the mutual recognition of professional accreditations.

I. Context of Issues

The concept of migration is clearly a concept with many dimensions, which among others shall include the cross-border mobility of students, skilled workers, and professionals. In other words, people are moving to other countries for different purposes. Some are searching for the opportunities of further studies leading to qualifications and degrees. Some are leaving their home countries in search of work ranging from skill-based jobs to professional careers.

Quality assurance is also a kind of goal that could be achieved at different levels by different authorities and organizations using different approaches. Every country has its own traditions, ways of ensuring quality of higher education and wording system and terminology to conceptualize its experience. It is almost agreed that government authorities, quality assurance agencies (including professional accreditation bodies), higher education institutions, and other stakeholders should all be parts of the process leading to the quality enhancement in higher education.

As for the mutual recognition of studies, diplomas, and degrees in higher education, it is stated in the UNESCO regional convention that ‘the recognition of a foreign certificate, diploma or degree of higher education means its acceptance by the competent authorities of a contracting state and the granting to the holder of the rights enjoyed by persons possessing a national certificate, diploma or degree with which
the foreign one is assessed as comparable by competent authorities within the contracting states. Such rights extend to either the pursuit of studies or the practice of a profession, or both, according to the applicability of the recognition.’ (UNESCO, 1983, Article 1) It is clear from the text above that the purposes of the recognition of foreign credentials are twofold: one is for further studies and the other is for employment.

To put these three things together in the Chinese context, the following backgrounds could be taken into account when we talk about migration and quality assurance and mutual recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees.

I.1. Higher education degrees and diplomas in China

As China’s higher education transformed from previous elite system to the stage of mass higher education in the past decade, one of the important consequences was the diversification of the missions of the system. Before expansion, higher education in China was mainly offering academic degree courses with university graduates getting jobs largely in public sector.

Academic degrees

The traditional academic degree programs are still remaining as the dominant parts of university education, including Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees in Arts, Science, Engineering, Medicine, etc. In an era of higher education expansion, relevance and social engagement have come up as major social concerns for colleges and universities. It is expected that the number of students taking traditional academic degree programs should be kept stable rather than to expand, and let the expansion of non-university higher education sector to support the massification of higher education in China.

Professional degrees

Another development with the expansion of higher education in China is the expansion of professional degree courses in colleges and universities. Since it’s launching in 1990, there are altogether 13 professional degree courses that have been approved by the Academic Degrees Committee of State Council (ADCSC) of China, including Master of Public Administration (MPA), Master of Business Administration (MBA), Master of Education Administration (MEA), Master of Engineering (ME), Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA), Juris Master (J.M), MPH, MSE, etc. Unlike academic degrees which are based on academic and theoretical research, the professional degree is designed to train high level professionals who practice in certain professions (ADCSC, 1996)

Higher vocational diplomas

One of the major strategies of the expansion was the increase in non-university higher vocational education which was market and employment oriented and focused on vocational courses which are highly relevant to the local social and economic development. Students graduated from higher vocational institutions can usually get Diploma of Higher Vocational Education (DHVE). But if they want to get access to
the job market and apply for certain kind of jobs, they have to pass through certain examinations with criteria set by the employment authorities and get the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in certain areas of work. In 2004, The Ministry of Education launched a pilot project to encourage higher vocational education institutions to implement Dual-Certificate System by which student could get both DHVE and NVQ after their study in higher vocational education institutions and therefore be in better position to get access to the job market (Joint Research Team, 2006).

I.2 Quality assurance systems for degrees and diplomas in China

There are many types of quality assurance system currently in operation in China, which concerns different kinds of degrees and qualification courses and involves different government departments and quality assurance agencies.

Quality assurance of academic degree programs

Academic degree courses are usually provided by colleges and universities. According to National Degree Regulation of the People's Republic of China, which has been effective since January, 1981 and revised in 2004, universities and colleges in China should be authorized to award degrees and get degree awarding status in certain disciplines before they could offer degree programs in approved disciplines. The national regulating authority is ADCSC, a governmental organization in charge of degrees and postgraduate education in China with its office located in the Ministry of Education.

The government retained its control over the development and distribution of undergraduate programs by issuing Catalogue of Undergraduate study programs and introducing validation and registration system with regard to the setting up of the new undergraduate study programs in colleges and universities. The same measures also apply to the study programs at postgraduate level. The catalogues of study programs is a national guideline for colleges and universities to refer to when they plan and develop their study programs and have been updated regularly to reflect the changing needs of social and economic development of the country. The validation and registration system is designed to control the development of new study programs with the provincial education authorities playing the major roles in the validating process and all the validated study programs should finally get registered in the Ministry of Education. However, some top universities have been given the power to set up new study programs outside the national catalogues, as part of the government’s effort to promote institutional autonomy of the universities with the aim of encouraging them to be more responsive to the social and economic development of the society. Top universities have also been given the power to validate their new degree programs, but which are still subject to the final registration of the Ministry of Education.

From 2002, colleges and universities offering undergraduate programs are also required to accept teaching quality evaluation once every five years organized by the Ministry of Education. The results are divided into four levels: Excellent, Good, Fairly Good or Failing. The results of the evaluation would be made available to the
public. In August 2004, a semi-governmental national quality assurance agency for undergraduate education called the National Higher Education Evaluation Center (NHEEC) was founded to monitor the implementation of higher education evaluation in the country. Although the center has very strong link with the Ministry, its founding has been regarded as China’s attempt to introduce a professional organization that will operate in the field of higher education evaluation. Postgraduate degree programs are also been evaluated periodically by evaluation teams organized by the ADCSC.

Quality assurance of professional degree programs

The quality assurance for professional degree programs is the responsibility of ADCSC. According to the government regulation (ADCSC, 1996), higher education institutions and government professional regulating agencies could jointly apply to the ADCSC for the establishment of a professional degree in certain profession. The ADCSC should cooperate with relevant organizations to set up a panel team to evaluate the application and decide if the application could be approved or not. Once the application was approved, the ADCSC should set up a National Steering Committee of professional degree in certain study area (for example, National Steering Committee on MBA Education, MEA Education, etc.) with members from higher education institutions, professional bodies and regulating agencies to develop a national guideline for the curriculum development, modality of teaching activities and the criteria of evaluation for the professional degree in the approved study area.

Higher education institutions could apply for offering professional degrees in certain study areas and the ADCSC would invite a panel of experts to evaluate the conditions of the applying higher education institutions, including their teaching quality, institutional infrastructure and management capacity. Those who meet the requirements set by the ADCSC would be accredited and approved to provide professional degree programs. The accredited higher education institutions should operate under the guidance of the National Steering Committees and get their quality check and evaluation periodically. Those who fail to pass through quality evaluation would be suspended from the right to provide professional degree programs. It is also stated in the government regulation that professional regulating authorities should consider the holding of relevant professional degree as one of the priority requirements for the entry of their profession.

Quality assurance of vocational diplomas

With the expansion of higher education system, a large number of higher vocational education institutions have been established across the country, which is believed to be helpful in increasing the social relevance and accountability of the higher education system as a whole and strengthening the strategic role of the higher education system in china’s social and economic development.

Institutional accreditation of newly established higher vocational education institutions is the responsibility of the provincial government. According to government regulation (Office of the State Council, 2000), the provincial government should set up accreditation agencies to conduct evaluation work concerning the establishment of new higher vocational education institutions. The new institutions which meet the requirements set by the government could be approved and registered
in the Ministry of Education’s list of accredited higher vocational education institutions.

The accredited higher vocational education institutions should also receive periodical quality evaluation organized by the Ministry of Education and those who fail to pass the evaluation would be asked to make improvement in a certain period of time. If required improvement is not achieved after that time, the failing institutions would be suspended from recruiting students until they are abolished.

As for the setting up and validation of study programs in higher vocational education institutions, the Ministry of Education is responsible for publishing *Guiding Catalogue of Higher Vocational Education Programs* as a basic government document regulating the setting up and restructuring of study programs in higher vocational education institutions and other institutions offering higher vocational education courses. It would also serve as important reference for employers to select and recruit graduates of higher vocational education institutions. The provincial education authorities are responsible for the validation and approval of higher vocational study programs, which are subject to the final registration of the Ministry of Education. The national catalogue is flexible and open to further revisions provided that new study programs outside the catalogue are popular and in close link with the new demand of the social and economic development of the society (MOE, 2004a).

**I.3 The access to professional and vocational jobs**

The degrees and diplomas stated above are mainly administrated by the government education authorities. The *Labor Act of the People’s Republic of China* states that ‘the government would identify the types of jobs in the labor market, establish the standards of professional and vocational skills of the regulated professional and vocational jobs and introduce professional and vocational qualification system. The government approved skills examination agencies would be responsible for the identification of the vocational skills and competence of the candidate laborers’ (Chapter 8, Article 69).

Therefore, for the access to the professional and vocational jobs, there are also professional and vocational qualification systems leading to the registration and licensing of people to practice in certain professional and vocational jobs. The professional and vocational qualification systems are actually kinds of access control by the government of certain jobs that is highly related to the security of life and property of the people in the country. They are mainly administrated by the government employment authorities and other government regulating Ministries.

**Professional jobs**

In China, the regulations of the access into professional jobs such as these in Medicine, Law, Teaching, Architecture, Accounting, Engineering, etc. have mainly been the responsibility of the government regulating authorities. For example, the titles of Licensed Medical Doctor and Licensed Nurse is awarded by the Ministry of Health, the title of Licensed Solicitor is regulated by the Ministry of Justice. The title of Licensed Architect and Licensed Engineer in specified areas are mainly administrated by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Construction.
Professional qualifications is used as a kind of government access control of the high level jobs and professions that are of wide social coverage, crucial importance to the public interests. For a person to get the license to practice in a given professional job, he or she needs to have certain kinds of degrees or study certificates that are set by the government regulations. This would qualify him or her to take part in the national professional qualification examinations organized by regulating government authorities. The examinations are held several times a year with the same syllabuses and contents of examination nationwide. Those who pass the examinations would be granted national professional qualifications in given professions, which could be used as certificates of the professional competence of their holders and legal qualifications for the holders to get registered as licensed professional (MOP, 1995).

Once a candidate gets the professional qualification in certain profession, he or she needs to register with the regulating authorities within a given period of time. In some professions, the candidates with professional qualification need to have fixed employer before they are coming for the registration. Once the candidates get themselves registered with the regulating authorities, they would become licensed professionals eligible for practicing in certain professions.

Vocational jobs

The regulation of vocational jobs is currently the responsibility of Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security (MOHRSS), a newly established government ministry with the merger of the responsibilities of the former Ministry of Personnel and Ministry of Labor and Social Security. The government has issued a *National Catalogue of Vocational Jobs* in which 66 categories of vocational jobs are subject to the access control of the government.

Those who want to take vocational jobs need to pass the national vocational qualification examinations in certain job areas which are normally organized by government approved skills examination agencies. Those who succeed in the examination would be awarded national vocational qualifications in certain job areas. National vocational qualifications are used to reflect the basic requirements in knowledge, skills and competence for people to practice in certain vocational jobs. There are 5 levels of national vocational qualification: starting level (level 5), intermediate level (level 4), advanced level (level 3), technician level (level 2), and advanced technician level (level 1) with each level having its own skills and competence requirements.

For the vocational jobs which are included in the government access control list, local job centers should provided relevant information notices to the job seekers. They are also required to put a column of vocational qualification requirement in the job application forms that are used by the job seekers. Only those who have the required vocational qualifications could be registered and eligible for the application of certain vocational jobs. Employers who are unable to recruit laborers without required national vocational qualifications would be punished according to the government regulations. For those who apply to engage in private individual businesses, they also need to have the required national vocational qualifications before they are allowed to do so.
I.4 The regulations on foreign citizens working in China

With the implementation of open up policies and the rapid development of the economy in the past decades, foreign citizens have increasing opportunities to work in China through different channels. To regulate foreign citizens working in China, the Chinese government issued *Regulation on Foreign Citizens Working in China* in 1996, which could be summarized as follows:

- The regulation authorizes the provincial employment authorities the responsibility of regulating the foreign citizens working in the country.
- Employers who want to employ foreign citizens need to apply for work permits for foreign candidates. Foreign citizens who get work permits should also get employment certificate after they arrive in China.
- Foreign citizens who want to work in China should be over 18 years old, have required vocational qualifications and work experiences, have no criminal records and have fixed employers registered in the country.
- Foreign professionals who are directly employed by the government and other public organizations would be issued Certificate of Foreign Experts and do not need to have work permit and employment certificate.
- Foreign citizens who are employed to conduct international exchange programs in China under the international and bilateral agreements and those who are serving as chief representatives of foreign enterprises in China do not need to have work permit and would be directly granted employment certificate.
- The regulation does not apply to persons employed by foreign embassies and consulates, UN representative offices and other international organizations with diplomatic privileges and immunities.

In 2004, the government issued *Regulation on the Approval of Foreign Experts Working in China*, which is mainly concerned with the foreign professionals and senior administrative persons. It is provided in the regulation that foreign professionals employed to work in the fields of education, research, media, publishing, culture, public health, sports and senior technical and administrative persons employed in enterprises registered in China should have Bachelor or above degrees and 5 years of working experience.

In 2005, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security issue a circular on the qualification requirements for foreign citizens to work in China, which states that

- Due to the lack of the agreements on mutual recognition of vocational qualifications with foreign governments, foreign citizens who want to take regulated vocational jobs should in principle have the relevant Chinese national vocational qualifications.
- As for foreign citizens who want to work in China in vocational jobs that are of foreign characteristics such as western cooking or western bakery, they could use vocational qualifications issued by their home governments or vocational bodies as the qualifications for taking that kinds of vocational jobs in China. However, these home qualifications should be validated by their home validating agencies with validation certificate both in Chinese and English.
- Foreign citizens are allowed to take part in the Chinese national qualification examinations in Chinese territory. But the examination paper should only be in
II. Examination and registration systems in selected professions

For specialized professions such as medicine, nursing, architecture, accounting, engineering, etc., practitioners should get professional license before they could be allowed to practice in these professions. For the issuance of professional licenses, there are normally requirements in education, working experiences, and professional qualifications on the part of the candidates.

II.1 Medicine

The major professional license in medicine in China is the licensed medical doctor. According to the Licensed Medical Doctor Act of the People's Republic of China, which has come into effect since 1 May 1999, licensed medical doctor is a professional title of those practicing professional work in medical and health organizations. The licensed medical doctor includes licensed medical doctor and licensed assistant medical doctor.

Study, diploma, and degree requirements for the candidates

There are degree, diploma, and working experience requirements for the candidates who want to take part in the medical professional entry examinations which would lead to the award of licensed medical doctor.

For the eligibility of the candidates to sit in the examinations for licensed assistant medical doctor, it is required that the candidates should have higher education diplomas in medicine or secondary vocational certificate in medicine and have finished one year probation period in medical and health organizations under the supervision of licensed medical doctors.

For the eligibility of the candidates to sit in the examinations for licensed medical doctor, the candidates should meet one of the following requirements: (1) have university undergraduate degree in medicine and have worked in medical and health organizations for 2 years under the supervision of licensed medical doctors; (2) have higher education diplomas in medicine and have worked in medical and health organizations after receiving the title of licensed assistant medical doctor for 2 years; or have secondary vocational certificate in medicine and have worked in medical and health organization for 5 years.

Those who have learned traditional Chinese medicine through apprenticeship for up to three years and have acquired professional expertise after many years of practicing could be recommended by the local medical and health organizations to take part in the examinations for the licensed medical doctor and licensed assistant medical doctor.

Foreign citizens could also be allowed to participate in the medical professional entry examination provide that they have Chinese university undergraduate degrees in medicine and have received one year professional training in Chinese medical and health organizations under the supervision of licensed medical doctor (MOH, SATCM,
Medical professional entry examinations

The medical professional entry examinations are supervised by the Ministry of Health and its Medical Professional Examination Council (MPEC) and organized by the National Medical Examinations Center (NMEC) with each having branch organizations at provincial and local levels. There are two levels of the medical professional entry examinations. One is for the licensed medical doctor and the other is for the licensed assistant medical doctor. The fields of each level of examination are also divided into 4 categories, namely clinical medicine, Chinese traditional medicine, stomatology, and public health under which there are all together 24 sub-categories of the entry examinations. Medical professional entry examinations in clinical medicine, Chinese traditional medicine, and stomatology are open to qualified foreign citizens.

The medical professional entry examinations are composed of practical skills testing and comprehensive paper testing. The former would take place in regional and local testing station and the latter would be held once a year in September with 4 modules of examination content for those applying for licensed medical doctor and 2 modules for those applying for licensed assistant medical doctor.

Professional registration

Once a candidate passes the medical professional entry examinations, he or she needs to apply for professional registration at local health authority. The local health authority should give the candidate professional registration within 30 days after receiving the registration application and issue him or her professional license with national unified format printed by the Ministry of Health. The names of the people who are registered as licensed medical doctor should be reported to the Ministry of Education.

The professional license of medical doctor would specify the practicing location, category and areas of the licensed medical doctor who would be working in different types of medical and health organizations. Without medical doctor practicing license, anybody would be prohibited from practicing medicine in China.

Regulation on foreign medical doctors practicing in China

According to Regulation on Foreign Medical Doctors Practicing on Short Time Basis in China, which has been effective since 1992, foreign licensed medical doctors could be invited or employed to practice in Chinese medical and health organizations for no more than one year. They would need to register with the Chinese health authorities before practicing. For the registration, foreign medical doctors need to provide the following documents: (1) Registration application form; (2) Degree certificate; (3) Foreign medical license; (4) Health certificate; (5) Invitation letter from the host organization or employment contract. The documents in Item (2) and (3) should be notarized by notary service agencies. The application case would be processed within 30 days by the government health authorities. If the registration application is approved, the applicants would be issued short-term practicing license and could legally practice medicine in China.
II.2 Nursing

Nursing has been a profession that is subject to government access control since the 1990s. In 1993, the Ministry of Health issued Regulation on Nurse, which for the first time introduced licensing examination system for the nursing profession. The regulation of the nursing profession has been updated recently when more government regulations on the nursing profession have been released, including Statute on Nurse (2008), Regulation on the Registration of Licensed Nurses (2008), Regulation on the Licensing Examination of Nursing Profession (2008).

Study, diploma, and degree requirements for the candidates

Candidates who meet the one of the following requirements could be eligible for taking part in the professional entry examination for nursing (MOH, 2008).

1. Have graduation certificate in Nursing and Midwifery from full-time secondary vocational schools recognized by provincial or national education and health authorities;
2. Have higher education diplomas in Nursing and Midwifery from full-time higher education institutions recognized by provincial or national education and health authorities;
3. Have Bachelor or above degree in Nursing and Midwifery from full-time higher education institutions recognized by the national education authority.

Professional entry examinations

The professional entry examinations for nurse are supervised by the Ministry of Health. Nurse Entry Examination Council (NEEC) is responsible for the formulation of the syllabus, modalities and contents of the examinations. The date of the examinations would be announced to the public three months in advance and the results of the examination would be released within 30 days after the examinations. Candidates who pass the professional entry examination would be awarded Qualified Nurse Status.

Registration

Candidates with Qualified Nurse Status are required to register with the local health authorities before they start practicing nursing in medical and health organizations. For the registration, the applicants need to provide the following documents: (1) Registration application form; (2) Applicant’s personal identification card; (3) Certificates of studies, diplomas and practical training; (4) Certificate of qualified nurse status; (5) Health certificate issued by recognized medial organizations; (6) Employment contract and other related documents.

Upon receiving the registration application, health authority should check the validity of application documents and make the final decision as to whether the application should be approved or not within 20 days. Once the registration application is approved by the health authorities, the candidates would be issued the license of practicing in the nursing profession. If the application is not approved, the health
authority should provide the reason in written form.

II.3 Architecture

As the rapid development of China’s economy, architecture has become one of the most popular industries in the country. In the field of architecture, one of the most important professional licenses is the Registered Architect. In September 1995, the government issued Statute on the Registered Architect of the People’s Republic of China which provide legal framework for the regulation of registered architect. In the year 1996, the then Ministry of Construction (now known as Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development since 1998) regulation for the implementation of the above-stated statute and the latest version of the regulation was released in 2008. There are two levels of registered architect: first-class registered architect and second-class registered architect.

Study and degree requirements for the candidates

Candidates who meet one of the following requirements could be eligible for taking part in the profession examination for first-class registered architect:

1. Have Master degree in Architecture or PhD degree of Engineering in the areas of Urban Planning, Architecture Engineering or Environmental Art, etc. and have at least 2 years of working experience in architecture design and other related areas.
2. Have Bachelor degree in Architecture or Master degree of Engineering in the areas of Urban Planning, Architecture Engineering or Environmental Art, etc. and have at least 3 years of working experience in architecture design and other related areas.
3. Have university undergraduate certificate in Architecture and have at least 5 years of working experience in architecture design, or have university undergraduate certificate in the areas of Urban Planning, Architecture Engineering or Environmental Art, etc. and have at least 7 years of working experience in architecture design and other related areas.
4. Have professional rank of Senior Engineer with at least 3 years of working experience in architecture design and other related areas, or have professional rank of Engineer with at least 5 years of working experience in architecture design and other related areas.
5. Do not meet anyone of the above-stated 4 requirements but have made great achievements in architecture design and other related areas, which are recognized by the National Registered Architect Council.

Candidates who meet one of the following requirements could be qualified to take part in the professional examination for the second-class registered architect:

1. Have at least university undergraduate certificate in Architecture or related areas such as Urban Planning, Architecture Engineering or Environmental Art, etc. and have at least 2 years of working experience in architecture design and other related areas.
2. Have at least university undergraduate certificate in Architecture Design or related areas such as Urban and Rural Planning, Housing Engineering, Scenic Gardening, Building Decoration Technology or Environmental Art, etc. and have at least 3
years of working experience in architecture design and other related areas.

(3) Have certificate of 4-year secondary vocational studies in Architecture Design and have at least 5 years of working experience in architecture design and other related areas.

(4) Have certificate of secondary vocational studies in Industry and Civil Building, Building Decoration, Urban Planning and Rural Development, and have at least 7 years of working experience in architecture design and other related areas.

(5) Have at least the professional rank of Assistant Engineer and have at least 3 years of working experience in architecture design and other related areas.

Professional Examination

The professional examination for the registered architect is a national examination organized by the National Registered Architect Council (NRAC) and implemented by Provincial Registered Architect Councils (PRACs).

The contents of the professional examination for first-class registered architect include preparation work of architecture designs, designs of ground space, architecture designs and specifications, architecture structures, environmental control, architecture equipments, architecture materials and structure, the economy of architecture, management of designing and construction, and laws and regulations in architecture building, etc.. These contents would be included in the different examination subjects and the examination results would be valid for 8 years.

The contents of the professional examination for second-class registered architecture include designs of ground space, architecture designs and specifications, architecture designs and equipments, laws and regulations in architecture building, the economy of architecture and construction, etc... These contents would be included in the different examination subjects and the examination results would be valid for 4 years.

Candidates who pass the professional examination for first-class registered architect would be awarded qualifications of first-class registered architect, which are issued by NRAC with stamps of national government construction authority and personnel authority. Candidates who pass the professional examination for second-class registered architect would be granted qualification of second-class registered architect, which are issued by PRACs with stamps of national government construction authority and personnel authority.

Registration

Candidates with the above-stated professional qualifications and those who have recognized foreign professional qualifications under the mutual agreement of professional qualifications should register with PRACs and endorsed by NRAC and get professional registrations before they could practice with the title of registered architect in China’s territory.

The basic requirements for the initial registration of registered architect include: (1) have qualification of registered architects or recognized equivalent foreign qualifications; (2) employed full time by employer in construction, designing, pricing consulting and other related service agencies in China’s territory; (3) have engaged in
architecture design and other related work in China’s territory for at least 1 years during the last 3 year; (4) have met professional continuing education requirements. The applicants for initial professional registration should submit the registration application within 3 year after they receive the professional qualification. Those unable to do so would be required to meet the continuing professional education requirements set by the NRAC before they could submit the application for initial professional registration.

The professional registration for the registered architect would be valid for 2 years and is subject to renewal for every 2 years, provided that the registered architects have met the continuing professional education requirements.

II.4 Accounting

The professional license in the field of accounting in China is Certificated Public Accountant (CPA). There are special national act and government regulations that have been put in force to regulate the operation of this particular professional qualification, including Certificated Public Accountant Act of the People’s Republic of China (1993), Regulation on the National CPA Examination (2001), Regulation on the Registration of the Certificated Public Accountant (2005), Regulation on Foreign Citizens and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Citizens Taking Part in the Professional examination of Registered Accountant in the People’s Republic of China (2008).

Study, diploma, and professional rank requirements of the candidates

Candidates who have at least graduation certificates of non-degree higher education institutions or have at least intermediate level of professional ranks could be qualified to take part in the national CPA examination.

Candidates who have high professional ranks in Accounting or other related areas, including those with associate professorship and professorship in Accounting in education and research institutions could be exempted from taking part in one subject testing of the professional examinations, provided that the exempted testing subject is in the area of their specialization.

National CPA examination

The National CPA Examination Council (NCEC) established by the Ministry of Finance is responsible for the supervision of organization of the national CPA examination. The Office of NCEC is located in Chinese Certified Public Accountants Association (CCPAA). The Provincial CPA Examination Councils (PCECs) established by the Provincial finance authorities are responsible for the local organization of national CPA examination with their offices set up at the Provincial Certified Public Accountants Association (PCPAAs).

There are currently 5 subjects that are included in the national CPA examination: accounting, financial auditing, financial costs management, economic law and taxation law. The NCEC would issue the examination syllabuses. The examination would be held once a year in September and the results of the examination would be publicized in December every year. Those who pass the examination in all required
subjects would be awarded certificate of national CPA examination.

Professional registration

The PCPAAs would be responsible for the registration and regulation of the certificated public accountants in their region with the guidance of the CCPAA.

Those who have at least 2 years of working experience in accounting in China’s territory and have passed the national CPA examination could be qualified to apply professional registration with the PCPAAs: (1) have taken part in the national CPA examination and got the certificate of CPA examination; (2) have recognized equivalent qualifications.

The applicants should provide following documents when applying for registration:

(1) Application form for the registration of CPA status;
(2) Certificate of national CPA examination;
(3) Reference letters from two certificated Public Accountants demonstrating that the applicants have at least 2 years of working experience in accounting;
(4) Employment contract with the accounting service agency they work;
(5) Applicant’s personal identification card.
(6) Valid certificate of personal professional records.

The PCPAA would process the registration application according to the requirements and make the final decision normally within 20 working days after receiving the application. Once a registration application is approved, the applicants should be awarded CPA certificate within 10 working days after the date of approval.

The regulation on foreign citizens applying for CPA certificate

It is clearly stated in the government regulation (MOF, 2008) that the identification of qualified foreign citizens should be based on the principle of mutual benefits, which means that if foreign countries allow Chinese citizens to take part in their registered accountants examination, the Chinese government could also allow citizens from these countries to take part in the national CPA examination.

Foreign citizens who are identified according to the principle of mutual benefits should meet one of the following requirements before they are allowed to take part in the national CPA examination:

(1) Have received at least graduation certificates from Chinese non-degree higher education institutions recognized by the Chinese national education authority or foreign non-degree higher education institutions recognized by the NCEC.
(2) Have received foreign recognized registered accountants certificate (or other equivalent professional qualification)
(3) Have passed one subject testing in Chinese national CPA examination.

Foreign candidates should generally follow the same procedures in CPA examination and registration as the Chinese candidates. Those who passed the national CPA examination could be registered as member of Chinese Certificated Public
II.5 Law

Licensed solicitor status is obviously the major professional license in the field of Law in China. According to the latest version of the *Licensed Solicitor Act of the People's Republic of China*, which has come into effect since 1 June 2008, candidates who want to practice as licensed solicitors should go through the National Judicial Examination and get the practicing license.

Study requirements of the candidates

Candidates who have at least university undergraduate study certificate in Law or in other majors with knowledge in Law could be qualified to take part in the national judicial examinations.

National Judicial examination

National judicial examination is a national qualification examination for newly appointed judges, prosecutors, and licensed solicitors. It is designed to test the candidates’ knowledge and competence in the Law profession. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for issuing the examination syllabuses. The contents of the national judicial examination include: theory of law, the application of law, studies on existing laws and regulations, legal practices, and ethical issues in legal profession.

The national judicial examination is supervised by the Ministry of Justice and organized by the provincial Department of Justice. The examination is held in September once a year. Those who pass the examination would be granted certificate of national judicial examination.

Professional licensing

Candidates who pass the national judicial examination and have spent one year on probation in solicitor service agencies could apply for the certificate of registered solicitor. The application should be submitted to the local judicial administration with the following documents:

(1) Certificate of national judicial examination;
(2) Materials provided by solicitors’ association concerning the performance of applicants during the probation year;
(3) Personal identification card;
(4) Letter of work confirmation from solicitor service agency.

The local judicial authorities are responsible for accepting the applications, making preliminary decisions and sending the results and relevant materials to the provincial judicial authorities within 20 days after they accept the applications. The provincial judicial authorities should assess the application cases and make the final decision as to whether the application cases could be approved within 10 days after they receive the preliminary results and relevant materials. Those whose applications are approved would be granted the certificate of registered solicitor.
III. Mutual recognition of studies, diplomas, degrees, and professional qualifications:

Study certificates, diplomas, and degrees are normally issued by higher education institutions and thus subject to the regulations of government education authorities. Professional qualifications and licenses are normally administered by the employment authorities and other government ministries. Graduates of higher education institutions who want access to the professional job markets need to go through two stages: the first is to get the required study certificates, diplomas or degrees for a certain profession; the second is to get the professional license, which involving professional examination and professional qualification and professional registration. Therefore, mutual recognitions should apply to study certificates, diplomas and degrees issued by higher education institutions, as well as professional qualifications and licenses administrated by the employment authorities or other government ministries.

III.1 Mutual recognition of higher education qualifications

For the access to certain professions, there are always requirements in study certificates, diplomas or degrees in higher education. Mutual recognitions in studies, diplomas and degrees would of course be helpful in eliminating the first barrier to the cross-border employment of people in professional jobs. China is one of the contracting countries of the Regional conventions on mutual recognition of studies, diplomas, and degrees in higher education in Asia and the Pacific, and so far has signed bilateral agreements concerning the mutual recognition on studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education with 22 countries, including major receiving countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, France, etc. The bilateral agreements with foreign countries have almost the same format but also with variations from country to country.

Bilateral agreement with the United Kingdom

In February 2003, Agreement of the Government of People's Republic of China and the government of the United Kingdom on the Mutual Recognition of studies and Degrees in Higher Education was signed by the representatives of both governments.

According to the agreement, the purposes of the agreement are to simplify the mutual recognition procedures of diplomas and degrees issued by higher education institutions from both countries. Both countries should designate relevant agencies with the responsibility of providing related information and make specific recommendations based on their domestic laws and practices.

The agreement of mutual recognition applies to studies and degrees issued in all recognized higher education institutions and research institutions with degree awarding powers in both countries.

The designated agencies should provide consultations and recommendations to their own higher education institutions on the comparability of the studies and degrees issued by both countries, considering the differences of both systems. Both sides
should share the information based on researches on the comparability of studies and degrees of both countries on equal basis.

The designated agencies of both sides should also provide information to their own citizens of the recognized higher education institutions in both countries. The lists of recognized higher education institutions of both countries would be provided to each other through diplomatic channels and would be updated periodically.

Both sides would encourage their higher education institutions to cooperate in mutual recognition of study credits

The agreement also specifies the rights of studies and degrees holders concerning their further studies in each other country.

(1) The holders of Bachelor degrees of Chinese higher education institutions could be qualified to take postgraduate degree courses or vocational courses in the UK provided that they meet the entrance requirements of these courses.
(2) The holders of Master degrees of Chinese higher education institutions could apply for the PhD degree courses in the UK provided that they have relevant studying experience and completed research proposals and meet the entrance requirements set by the UK higher education institutions.
(3) Those who have Chinese Bachelor degrees with outstanding ranks, high quality papers, and research experience could be qualified to directly take PhD courses in the UK provided that they meet the entrance requirements set by the UK higher education institutions.
(4) The holders of UK Master degrees could be qualified to take PhD courses in China.
(5) Those who have UK Bachelor degree (honorary) with outstanding ranks could be qualified to take PhD entrance examinations in China.
(6) The UK higher education institutions would reserve the rights to decide the entrance requirements according to their own regulations.

The two sides would set up a joint permanent experts committee with the responsibilities to (1) implement all the follow-up activities and further discussions the agreement may cause; (2) supervise or simplify the cooperation between the designated agencies and other organizations in order to facilitate the sustainable development and information communication of the mutual recognition mechanism. The committee would meet annually to discuss matters defined in the working plan endorsed by the designated agencies of both sides and the venue of the meeting should be negotiated through diplomatic channels.

Bilateral agreement with France

In 2003, the Ministry of Education of the people’s republic of China signed Administrative Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Degrees and Diplomas in Higher education with Ministry of Youth, National Education and Research of France. The highlights of the agreement could be summed up as follows:

It is clearly stated at the beginning of the agreement that the agreement is designed to strengthening bilateral exchange in higher education of both countries and simplifying
the procedures of students moving into each other’s country for further studies. The purpose of the agreement is to identify the ways of mutual recognition of degrees and diplomas and study credits based on the principle of equivalence.

The agreement examines the current structures of degrees, diplomas and studies in higher education systems of both countries. Then it specifies the ways of students entering into each other’s higher education systems:

For Chinese students applying for registration in French higher education institutions:

(1) Chinese students who for the first time want to apply for first year university courses leading to the award of French National Diplomas should have the same entrance qualifications as required by their home country in their selected courses. That means that they need to pass the Chinese higher education entrance examinations.

(2) Chinese students who have passed the Chinese higher education entrance examinations could be qualified to register in first year courses in les Sections de Technicien Supérieur (STS), which lead to the award of Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (BTS), and the first year courses in Institut Universitaire Technologique (IUT), which lead to the award of Diplôme universitaire technologique (DUT), provided that their applications are approved by the relevant admission committees.

(3) Chinese students who have passed the Chinese higher education entrance examinations could apply for the registration in the first year courses in the Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Écoles (CPGE).

(4) Chinese students who have completed first year courses or second year courses in Chinese higher education institutions (equals to 60 or 120 European credits) could apply for registration in second year courses or third year courses in French universities, provided that they have relevant certification letters from the Chinese higher education institutions and go through the study record checks.

(5) Chinese students who meet the same requirements set for French students and have certifications of two years’ studies in related areas could apply for registration of studies in Diplôme Supérieur d’arts Appliqués (DSAA) courses.

(6) Chinese students who have Chinese higher education diplomas (three years) or have written certification from Chinese higher education institutions that they have completed 3 years of undergraduate studies in China could apply for registration in first year courses in Grandes Écoles. Chinese students who have Chinese Bachelor degree could apply for registration in second year courses in Grandes Écoles.

(7) The French side thinks that the first three years courses of Chinese undergraduate education are equivalent to 180 European credits. Chinese students who have certifications of this equivalent studies could apply for registration in Maîtrise or first year Master degree courses in their own specializations. The French side also thinks that the Chinese four years undergraduate courses are equivalent to Licence+60 European credits. Chinese students who have Chinese Bachelor degrees could apply for registration in second year DEA, DESS or Master (Master recherche or Master Professionnel) courses.

(8) The French side thinks that Chinese Master Degrees are equivalent to 300 European credits. Chinese students with Master degrees could apply for registration in French Ph.D. courses.
For French students applying for registration in Chinese higher education institutions:

(1) French students with *le baccalauréat* or equivalent study certificates could apply for registration in first year courses in Chinese universities.

(2) French students with DEUG, DEUST, BTS or DUT could apply for registration in third year undergraduate courses in Chinese universities. French students with Licence degree could apply for registration in forth year undergraduate courses in Chinese universities.

(3) French students with Maîtrise diploma could apply for registration in the first year Master degree courses in Chinese universities.

(4) French students with DEA or Master recherche could apply for registration in PhD courses in Chinese universities.

The two sides agree to exchange information on the operation and changes of higher education systems in their respective countries.

**Bilateral agreement with Germany**

In order to promote the bilateral cooperation between the two countries and encourage students to go to each other’s countries for further studies, the government of the People’s Republic of China and Germany signed *Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of the Equivalence of Higher Education* in 2002.

The purpose of the agreement is to simplify the procedures of recognition on degrees and diplomas of both countries. The agreement includes suggestions to the recognition agencies of both countries that could make the recognition decisions based on their domestic laws. The legal provisions of employment are excluded in this agreement. The agreement applies to all public and government recognized higher education institutions in both countries.

The agreement states that the recognition of study times and study achievements by relevant agencies of both sides should be based on the teaching syllabuses and certification of study achievement of the applicants. If the applicants do not reach the required study achievements, they should have further study opportunities in the receiving institutions to fill the gaps.

Holders of Chinese Bachelor degrees could be qualified to get access to professional studies without the required examinations. Higher education institutions of both sides should determine the ways of examination results grading and conversion. German students who have graduation certificates and Bachelor degrees or German university students who have gone through at least 6 semesters of formal studies and pass the required examinations could take China’s Master students’ entrance examinations. Chinese students with domestic Master degrees could be qualified to take PhD degree courses in Germany. Chinese Bachelor degree holders with outstanding ranks and excellent research papers could be qualified to take study courses leading to the award of PhD degrees in Germany. Master degree holders should also pass the academic interview and the Bachelor degree holders should also write qualified papers.
Holders of German university graduation certificates or other equivalent graduation diplomas (Diplom, Lizenziat, and Magister Artium), graduates of German national examinations and holders of German Master Degrees could be qualified to take Ph.D. courses in China. The Chinese higher education institutions could determine if they could be exempted from taking the Ph.D. entrance examinations and all the Ph.D. degree courses and directly start writing the Ph.D. Dissertations case by case.

Holders of graduation certificates or Bachelor degrees with outstanding ranks from German higher professional colleges could be allowed to take Chinese Ph.D. entrance examinations according to the Chinese regulation.

There would be a joint permanent committee set up by both sides to handle all the problems the agreement may cause.

**Bilateral agreement with Russia Federation**

The *Agreement of the Government of People’s Republic of China and the Governments of Russia Federation on the Mutual Recognition of Studies and Degrees in Higher Education* was signed in 1995. The main contents of the agreement include,

(1) Both sides recognize the graduation certificates issued by each other’s secondary schools and holders of this kind of certificates could be qualified to take entrance examinations of higher education institutions in each other’s country.

(2) Both sides recognize the graduation certificates issued by each other’s secondary vocational schools and holders of this kind of certificates could be qualified to engage in job activities in specified areas or take the entrance examinations of higher education institutions in each other’s country.

(3) Both sides recognize studies and degrees issued by each other’s higher education institutions or research institutions and the holders of this kind of studies and degrees could be allowed to take professional activities in given areas, engage in further studies or take degree courses in each other’s country.

(4) The recognition in this agreement means that holders of the above-mentioned graduation certificates and degrees could have the same rights when they engage in job activities or pursue for further studies within the territories of the two countries. However, this could not rule out other ordinary requirements for taking job activities, applying for registration of studies and degrees set by the two countries.

(5) The two sides would exchange information on the reforms of education systems and the changes of the titles and requirements of the studies and degrees in their respective countries and make necessary revisions of the agreement accordingly.

**Validation of foreign studies and degrees**

In order to carry out the obligations the Chinese government committed under the relevant international conventions and bilateral agreements, facilitate the holders of foreign diplomas and degrees to take further studies and employment in China and provide validation and consultation services of foreign diplomas and degrees to the domestic higher education institutions and employers, under the authorizations of the ADCSC and the Ministry of Education, the Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE), which is affiliated to the Ministry of Education is responsible for
providing validation services for foreign studies and degrees in the country.

The contents of the validation include: (1) to examine the legitimacy of higher education institutions which issue the foreign degrees or diplomas; (2) to identify the validity of foreign degrees certificates or degree equivalent diplomas and certificates and provide consultations on the level of foreign degrees and diplomas; (3) to issue validation certificates for validated foreign degrees and diplomas.

The validation of foreign studies and degrees is not a compulsory requirement and is based on personal options. However, the validation certificates of foreign studies and certificates issued by the CSCSE are widely recognized as effective certificates for the returned Chinese students to apply for further studies, employment or migration in China. Foreign citizens who want to apply for further studies or take employment in China could apply for CSCSE’s validation of their studies and degrees. For this purpose, they need to provide their passports, degree certificates and academic achievement records (in Chinese), the abstract and contents of the degree paper, etc.

There are application collection points all over the country and applicants outside Beijing could place their application with local collection points. The validation for a particular application case would take 15-20 working days.

III.2 Mutual recognition of professional accreditations

As one of the important measures in the latest campaign for the quality enhancement in higher education, the Ministry of Education has launched a national project on professional accreditation (MOE, MOF, 2007). The purposes of the project are to set up minimum professional standards and professional accreditation procedures in certain areas, increase the international competitiveness of the Chinese professionals and facilitate the Chinese professional titles to be recognized internationally. 80 professional study programs in Engineering, Medicine and other professions have been selected to take the pilot studies. It is expected that by the year 2010, the existing 150 profession study programs would have their established professional standards with international comparability, which will be gradually linked to the access requirements of the professional jobs.

At the same time, efforts have been made to promote the mutual recognition of professional education in some professions.

Mutual recognition of architectural education

With the approval of the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and the ADCSC, the National Evaluation Committee on Architectural Education has jointly signed *International Accord on Substantial Equivalence for Architectural Education* with representative organizations from the UK, USA, Canada, Korea, Mexico, China and Australia, as well as the International Union of Architects and the Commonwealth Association of Architects in Canberra, Australia on 9 April 2008. The Canberra Accord is the first multilateral agreement on the mutual recognition of architectural education in the world, which was jointly initiated by UNESCO and UIA and had gone through more than 3 years of negotiations.
The signatories to the Accord agree that,

(1) their accreditation/validation systems for architectural education are substantially equivalent;
(2) their accredited/validated architectural programs are comparable in major aspects and meet the standards recognized by all signatories.
(3) the academic qualifications in architecture accredited/validated by one signatory should be recognized by all signatories (subject to any additional requirements imposed by local regulations).

The Canberra Accord was a significant achievement in the mutual recognition of architectural education world-wide. This was also the first time that China as a founding member signed an international agreement on mutual recognition on professional accreditations. The signing of the Canberra Accord would greatly facilitate China’s integration into the international architectural communities and provide the platform to enable more Chinese professionals to get foreign licensed architect titles and enter into international architecture markets.

Mutual recognition of Engineering education

Engineering profession is one of the major areas that are on the government’s priority lists for accreditation pilots. In order to promote mutual recognition of engineers with foreign countries, the Chinese Association of Science and Technology (CAST) established steering committee in April 2005 with the following responsibilities:

(1) Provide working support to the reforms of national engineers system.
(2) Draw up CAST working framework and long-term work plans and examine the short-term action plans for the promotion of mutual recognition of engineers.
(3) Supervise and facilitate the pilot projects of engineering accreditations with its branch associations.
(4) Promote international exchange in mutual recognition of engineers and speed up the reforms of national engineers system.

Special task forces have been established to study the existing international agreements on the mutual recognition of engineering education, including the Washington Accord, Sydney Accord, and Dublin Accord which concern the mutual recognition of studies and degrees in engineering education, and Engineers Mobility Forum (EMF) agreement, APEC Engineer agreement and Engineering Technologist Mobility Forum agreement which concern mutual recognition of professional qualifications.

The Washington Accord, signed in 1989 and revised in 1997, is an international agreement among bodies responsible for accrediting engineering degree programs in each of the signatory countries. It recognizes the substantial equivalency of programs accredited by those bodies and recommends that graduates of programs accredited by any of the signatory bodies be recognized by the other bodies as having met the academic requirements for entry to the practice of engineering. The Washington Accord is regarded as the most influential international agreement on the mutual recognition of engineering education, which would also provide a gateway to the membership of other international agreements.
Efforts have been made by the CAST and other relevant organizations to prepare for the application of Washington Accord membership.

(1) In 2005 International Engineering Meetings (IEM) held in Hong Kong, the CAST delegation officially announced that China had started the process of joining the international agreements on mutual recognition of engineering education. It was also expressed during the meetings that after entry into WTO, China would like to strengthen cooperation with international organizations in order to get China more integrated into the international engineering communities.

(2) Pilot projects on the reforms of domestic accreditation systems of engineering education have been initiated in many engineering areas.

(3) More international links have been established for information sharing and partnership building.

(4) Preparing for the establishment of Chinese Society of Engineers which would be serving as representative body of China with Washington Accord, and all the necessary documents required for the application of the provisional status with Washington Accord.

**Concluding remarks**

With the globalization of economies and internationalization of higher education, millions of people are on the move across borders either for taking further studies or conducting work-related activities. Recognition of foreign studies, diplomas, and degrees in higher education as well as foreign professional qualifications could play the vital role in establishing a comparable and transparent international framework which would gradually facilitate the portability of studies, diplomas, and degrees as well as professional qualifications across border.

**Academic education and professional education**

Lessons from the developed countries suggested that expansion of higher education system could be achieved mainly through the expansion of non-university sector higher technical and vocational education. In the case of China, the past decade of higher education expansion has also seen the emergence and expansion of higher vocational education with study programs much more linked to the national and local employment market. At the same time, traditional universities have taken flexible approaches to the market demands in their study programs and increased the employability of their graduates.

However, there are great potentials for the Chinese traditional universities to be more responsive to the changing needs of the employment market. In this regard, the following measures could be considered as the ways forward.

(1) With the expansion of higher education systems in China, it seems necessary to increase the professional education programs or convert traditional academic programs into profession education programs in traditional universities. Professional programs tend to be employment-oriented with clear professional prospects. This requires the combinations of general education subjects which are
so emphasized in university education and the professional subjects that are closely linked to the world of professional work.

(2) The government education authorities could consult government employment and human resources development authorities before issuing or revising the National Catalogue of Study Programs of higher education institutions so that the national catalogue could be more compatible with the national catalogue of professional and vocational jobs.

(3) The government education authorities could increase the institutional autonomy of universities in setting up new study programs to accommodate the changing needs of the employment market.

(4) The universities could establish internal mechanisms for the curriculum development of study programs, which should involve the participation of representatives of stakeholders such as students, employers, teachers, etc.

Higher education evaluation and professional accreditation

In China the term ‘evaluation’ is most frequently used in quality assurance systems of higher education. There are many types of higher education evaluation mechanisms currently operating in China, including institutional teaching evaluation, discipline-based evaluation, study program-based evaluation and professional education evaluation.

As one of the important measures to promote the quality assurance of higher education, the Chinese government has introduced professional accreditation systems in higher education with a number of pilot projects currently going on in major areas of Engineering, Medicine, Architecture, etc. One of the important differences of the professional accreditation systems is the involvement of professional bodies and practitioners in the formulation of professional standards. The professional accreditation would decide if professional programs to be accredited reach the required professional standards. In this regards, further efforts could be made in the following areas:

(1) The government could provide policy support for the nurturing of professional accreditation bodies with representatives from professional unions and associations, practitioners, university researchers to conduct professional accreditation in different professions

(2) Professional accreditation bodies could set up special groups to study the major international agreements in different areas and provide consultations on the latest development of the mutual recognition of professional accreditations.

(3) Professional accreditation bodies could strengthen their links with foreign professional accreditation bodies either on multilateral or bilateral basis for information sharing and partnership building.

(4) Professional accreditation bodies should consider international comparability when they design their accreditation standards and procedures.

Human resources development and mutual recognition of professional accreditation

The priority areas for mutual recognition of professional accreditation are closely linked to the national human resources development plan, especially for developing countries. In the Chinese context, efforts have been made by regulating authorities to
promote the mutual recognition of professional accreditations in fields such as Architecture and Engineering. Mutual recognition of professional accreditations in more professional fields would be facilitated according to the human resources development planning for internal and external demands. For this purpose, the following points might be useful:

(1) The government could establish dynamic monitoring systems for the internal and external demands of human resources and the systems could be shared by government education, employment, and other related authorities.

(2) The government could examine the issue of market access to the service sectors under the framework of WTO/GATS and its impact on the mobility of professionals. Professions in the service sector that are promised to be open to foreign providers could be listed as priority areas.

(3) The government could identify the professions that are of great importance to the social and economic development of the country, and at the same time suffering from shortage of qualified professionals. For these professions, efforts for the promotion of mutual recognition of professional accreditation could bring the country with foreign professional expertise that would benefit the establishment and development of domestic professional accreditation system.

Capacity Building

China has experience of forging international agreement on mutual recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education on multilateral and bilateral basis. Mutual recognition of professional education and accreditation is relatively a new development in China. Capacity building is needed at national and organizational levels to get China more integrated into the international academic and professional communities with comparable and transparent systems of professional accreditation.

(1) The government could cooperate with UNESCO and other professional bodies for more capacity building projects, so that peoples in the quality assurance system could be more aware of the rules of games concerning the mutual recognitions of education and professional qualifications.

(2) The government could have a clear policy of sending more people in the QA system to relevant IGOs and NGOs for internships or other forms of training so that they could benefit from their experience in these organizations.

(3) The government could encourage more bilateral or multilateral exchanges between Chinese and foreign professional bodies, which would promote the mutual understanding of their respective professional education systems.

Bibliography


