



# A comparative study of international branch campuses in Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea: regulation, governance, and quality assurance

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Received: 22 October 2017 / Revised: 30 July 2018 / Accepted: 1 August 2018 / Published online: 7 August 2018  
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## Abstract

Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea employed branch campuses as a means to develop and promote economic growth and global competitiveness. The aim of this study was to explore national policies and regulatory frameworks for international branch campuses in the four key nations identified above. The development of internal quality assurance mechanisms and external review approaches in international branch campuses were investigated, via in-depth interview and document analysis. The study presented three major findings. First, an inclusive model of internal quality has been developed in international branch campuses found in the four nations. Second, the international branch campuses' external quality assurance approaches, in the four countries, were diverse and included exemption, reliance on home country accreditation, duplication, and international accreditation. Third, South Korea and Singapore were more closely aligned to *liberal regulation with minimal quality assurance*, whereas Malaysia and China were in the category of *liberal regulation and restrict regulation*, respectively, but with comprehensive quality assurance process.

**Keywords** International branch campus · Quality assurance · Regulation · Governance

## Introduction

Since 2000 the number of international branch campuses (IBCs), representing a core element of cross-border education, has experienced a rapid and steady global increase. In 2002, there were only 24 IBCs, but by 2017, this number had risen to more than 300 worldwide (OBHE 2017). Currently, the largest providers are 'western' countries, including the United States of America (USA), Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), Russia, and France. Moreover, the majority of

these IBCs are located in Asia (Becker 2009; Garrett et al. 2016; Knight 2013). Building IBCs is regarded as one of the best strategies to improve the quality of domestic higher education as well as to strengthen the development of human capital (Ziguras and McBurnie 2011).

In recent years, the aspiration to become an education hub has been the strongest driver for Asian governments to establish IBCs. Knight (2013) stated, "Some countries see hubs as a means to build a critical mass of foreign students and providers for income generation as well as to modernize and internationalize their domestic higher education" (p. 10). There is a parallel for creating an education hub, which was not entirely developed. On one hand, it is expected to train foreign and local talent in order to generate a skilled labor force; on the other hand, there lies a significant opportunity for integration of the international and the local educational resources for national capacity building. In addition to these drivers, a focus on building "a vibrant research, knowledge and innovation sector" is evident in order to support the development of a knowledge economy (Knight 2011, p. 234). All in all, motivations vary and provide a need to ensure that quality is correctly managed and the experience relevant and valid for national context.

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Driven by global competition, several Asian nations, such as Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea, ambitiously set out to attract top foreign institutions to establish and develop branch campuses. China, Singapore, and Malaysia were the three top host countries of international branch campus in the Asia Pacific: 32 in China; 12 in Singapore; and 12 in Malaysia (Garrett et al. 2016). These nations aimed to become an educational hub in Asia and, subsequently use the influx of foreign universities to support this development. Accordingly, the argument could be made that if nations in a geographic region consider themselves a hub, either the term should be redefined or the region itself is becoming a hub.

Malaysia was the first of the four nations to develop IBCs. In the early 1970s, the Malaysian government started to allow foreign universities to offer programmes or colleges in Malaysia in order to provide quality higher education for local students, particularly, Chinese Malaysian students who were unable to obtain places at the public higher education institutions due to restricted ethnic admission policies. By the late twentieth Century, the Malaysian government had shifted its focus from demand to economic growth, aiming to become an educational hub in Asia, and leveraged the influx of IBCs to attract more international students to study in Malaysia. In 1998, the first branch campus, Monash University Malaysia, was established in Malaysia (Sidhu and Kaur 2011), followed quickly by the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus in 2000. To date, 7 out of the 12 IBCs in Malaysia are from UK and Australian universities.

The Singapore government understood that higher education could nurture human capital in addition to fostering economic growth (Mok 2011). Its aim is to promote Singapore as a “knowledge hub” through world-class “Singapore education” (Olds 2007; Tan 2014). Inviting prestigious universities to Singapore is one of the strategies to achieve this goal, differing from the Malaysian case which was driven by necessity in the early days. In addition, IBCs make it possible for greater numbers of domestic students to study in-country, without incurring greater economic costs abroad. According to the Council for Private Education in Singapore (CPE), there are nine foreign branch campuses recognized by the Singapore government but only *École Supérieure des Sciences Economiques et Commerciales (ESSEC)*, *The Business for the World (INSEAD)*, and *Singapore Polytechnic Jain School of Global Management* have their independent campuses (CPE 2015a). The diverse models in these two countries provide evidence that IBCs can be incorporated according to host nation’s need.

Since 2003, China has encouraged local universities, particularly those in rural areas, to collaborate with foreign institutions in order to transform the Chinese higher education system. In 2010, the Chinese government published *the National Medium and Long-term Plan for Education*

*Reform and Development (2010–2020)*, which purports to promote the quality of Chinese higher education by inviting world-class foreign universities to establish IBCs in China (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China 2010). Currently, China has six international branch campuses, operating as independent legal entities, of which the *University of Nottingham Ningbo Campus* was the first established in 2004. This partnership model is a further example of opportunities available for facilitating higher education development.

In comparison to the nations discussed above, South Korea’s engagement in this sphere is much more recent and yet has ambitious plans to attract ten top foreign universities to the *Incheon Economic Free Zone (OBHE 2004, 2017)*. South Korea’s government’s main objectives, by developing IBCs, are boosting the national economy and retaining local talent (Byun and You 2014). In 2012, the first IBC, *State University of New York, Korea (SUNY Korea)*, was established in the *Incheon Free Zone* followed by *George Mason, Ghent University, and University of Utah* in 2014.

Despite the relative success outlined above, some Asian countries, such as Thailand, India, and Taiwan, remain conservative about the establishment of IBCs, particularly in terms of national regulation. By contrast, Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea have developed and employed IBCs as a means to promote economic growth and global competitiveness. As a self-sustaining institution, IBCs are supposed to respond to national policy, local context, and priorities. The manner by which the quality of IBCs should be regulated represents an issue of national importance for hosting countries. As we can see from the examples above, the driving forces in each case differ: necessity, development, partnership, and expansion. The manner of creation can impact institutional governance, subsequent management, and quality assurance within, and without, the campus. While IBC numbers are increasing, we cannot afford to treat them as a single concept but instead examine the specific characteristics of each country case accordingly. Therefore, this research identifies and highlights major concerns for IBCs, including whether they provide a good-quality learning environment for both domestic and international students; and whether this quality achieves the minimum standards regulated by both home and host accreditors.

The purpose of this study is to explore national policies and regulatory frameworks for IBCs in Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea. Using *Ziguras and McBurnie (2015)* quality provision models as an analytical framework, internal quality assurance mechanisms and external review approaches of IBCs in the four importing countries are investigated and compared. The findings are presented and discussed, in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of internal operations, external relevance, and impact.

In order to address the key issues at hand, three research questions are employed as follows:

1. What national policies and quality regulations were in place for establishing IBCs in Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea?
2. How did IBCs in Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea employ institutional governance, management, and internal quality assurance mechanisms?
3. What were the external review approaches and quality provision models adopted by quality assurance agencies in Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea?

## Literature review

### Developmental models of IBCs, risks, and challenges

The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) defined that “an international branch campus is an off-shore entity of a higher education institution operated by the institution or through a joint venture in which the institution is a partner in the name of the foreign institution” (Altbach 2011, p. 2). Most important of all, students are awarded a degree from the foreign institution after a full completion of the programme taken at the host country. Stanfield and Wang (2012) state that the characteristics of a full-scale IBC are being independent entities, with adoption of home campus’ curriculum and organizational structure from home campus and offering a range of disciplines at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Generally speaking, an IBC should consist of three key features. First, it is an institution operating in a country outside of the home campus. Second, it awards degrees that bear the home institution’s name. Third, it provides face–face instruction supported by a permanent administration team. All in all, an IBC is indeed an institution physically located and operated from distance by a home institution (American Council of Education 2009).

Due to cultural and political differentiation, there are five major models for establishing IBCs including (1) self-funded, (2) external funding from host countries, (3) support from private companies or organization, (4) facilities lease from private sectors, and (5) academic collaboration with a local partner (Garrett et al. 2016; Lane 2013; Verbik 2006). The self-funded model, and by far the riskiest and intensive approach, is when the home institution sets up an IBC independently of external support. The second and third models are where IBCs are partially supported by the host country or private companies, in terms of buildings, facilities, or scholarships. Given their reduced risk approach, these are the most popular models adopted in Asian countries. Facilities lease from the private sector is another model, whereby, an IBC leases the land from the government or private sector

at the initial stage, but will move to develop its own campus after a few years. The final model is academic collaboration with a local institution, which means that the IBC is built within its partner’s campus.

National regulatory frameworks would often restrict transnational delivery of programmes under the host country’s jurisdiction in terms of course content, faculty recruitment, student admission, and research development (Cao 2011; Edwards et al. 2013; Lane 2013; Kinser and Lane 2013; Verbik 2006). As Coelen (2014) stated, “the host country environment, or barriers between the two campuses, may affect the efficacy of such quality-control mechanisms” (p. 24). Literally, the curricular changes, low faculty qualification, rigid admission policy, inconsistent learning outcomes assessment as well as limited research grants by the host government may impact, affect, or indeed, jeopardize the integrity and quality of IBCs.

Generally speaking, Lane (2013) concluded that internal and external factors, such as a national regulatory framework, school reputation, location, partners, finance, faculty, and support staff, facilities, will ultimately determine the success or failure of an IBC. He emphasized that three major challenges should be overcome. Firstly, the gap between the administrative relationships between the home and IBCs as this dynamic is not always straightforward or easily resolved (Lane 2011). Secondly, the quality control of programmes at an IBC is strenuous, including curriculum design, faculty qualification, and admission requirements, learning outcomes assessment. Thirdly, there are also big gaps in cultural, political, and social issues between both home and host campuses, such as religion, customs, government support (Altbach 2010; Lane 2013; Ziguras and McBurnie 2011). These above must be acknowledged and addressed cautiously.

Asian nations continue to regard the establishment of IBCs as one of the best strategies to enhance their international competitive advantages, though risks and challenges remain very high. The degree of risk and challenge would clearly change depending on the adoption of the regulation model, but not necessarily be reduced completely. While there is a considerable risk in ‘going it alone,’ there is likewise concern over partnerships and shared resources.

### Quality regulation of cross-border higher education and exporting countries’ policies

As more and more IBCs are being developed, the issue of their quality assurance is of national concern, for both sending and receiving countries. Students and employers are becoming more acutely vigilant as to whether the quality and outcome of the programmes at IBCs are equivalent to those at the home institution. According to *the UNESCO-APQN toolkit titled “Regulating the quality of cross-border*

education,” foreign institutions are often required to comply with national standards as local institutions do, including campus size, faculty recruitment, student admission (APQN 2006). Owing to the complexity of quality assurance of cross-border higher education, *The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)* published international guidelines titled “Quality provision in cross-border higher education,” which prioritized that students/learners should be protected “from the risks of misinformation, low-quality provision and qualifications of limited validity” in cross-border higher education (p. 6). To achieve the objective, quality assurance and accreditation agencies are expected to intensify their international cooperation with other agencies and develop strategies to cover transnational higher education within national qualification schemes (UNESCO and OECD 2005).

Some of the largest sending countries established quality assurance procedures for IBCs in the 1990s (Garrett et al. 2016). Given the issues surrounding the quality of transnational education, USA has endeavored to develop clear policies and strategies for foreign providers and accreditors, such as *Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals* by the Council of Postsecondary Accreditation and *Principles for United States accreditors working internationally* by Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (CHEA 2001; NEASC and CIHE 2003). Endorsed by all regional accreditors, *the Principles of Good Practice* pointed out that “the scrutiny of all institutions engaged in or planning to engage in developing campuses or moving educational programs abroad” is deserved (NEASC and CIHE 2003, p. 1). CHEA works with accreditors to assure that “the efforts in the international arena are handled in a careful and thoughtful manner” (CHEA 2002, p. 4).

In Australia, *Code of Ethical Practice in Provision Off-shore of Education Services by Australian Higher Education Institutions* was passed early in 1995, but it was not actually enforced. Until 2000, the Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) integrated transnational education into its audit manual. The UK likewise started to conduct an audit over transnational education, led and managed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). In “Literature review” section of the Code titled *Collaborative Provision and Flexible and Distributed Learning*, “it sets out a detailed list of expectations for UK providers operating in collaboration with partner institutions within the UK and abroad” (McBurnie and Ziguras 2007, p. 8). The QAA Audit report of overseas provisions also showed that the home institution often requested that international branch campuses adopted the same quality assurance and academic standards and learning outcomes as it did (QAA 2010). The University of Nottingham, for example, collates the full set

of quality guidelines, in a Quality Manual, applicable to staff at all three international locations; UK, China, and Malaysia. In addition, the QAA report also emphasized that the quality of modules delivered was supposed to be the same, but “the content of the teaching and programmes did not need to be identical, rather the equivalent, between campuses” (p. 3). According to the three major providers’ regulations above, home institutions bear the responsibility to ensure the quality of their offshore programmes, including curriculum design, teaching quality, faculty and staff engagement, student support, and information transparency.

### Concept of quality assurance and regulatory models of cross-border higher education at receiving countries

Quality assurance is “a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfills expectations or measures up to threshold minimum Requirements” (INQAAHE 2018, p. 1). In theory and practice, quality assurance consists of internal and external review approaches. Internal quality assurance refers to a quality review process undertaken within an institution for its own purpose. In most countries, external quality review is undertaken by a third party to evaluate quality and standard of higher education providers due to government mandates vice versa (Harvey 2004; Stensaker et al. 2011). Hence, internal quality assurance is considered as the part of the external process that an institution undertakes in preparation for an external quality assurance (Hou et al. 2015; INQAAHE 2018). As a result, all types of higher education providers, including IBCs, are supposed to “ensure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for students; that the learning opportunities provided are monitored; and that the provider considers how to improve them” (QAA 2015, p. 1).

Due to varying quality provisions, quality assurance agencies in both sending and receiving countries may naturally take different approaches towards external review of cross-border providers. The World Bank (2007) identified two common types of cross-border quality assurance *accreditation in the receiving country* and *accreditation in the sending country*. In the first type, *accreditation in the receiving country*, the accreditation of cross-border programmes or institutions is carried out by local quality assurance agencies, which provide not only information to local stakeholders, but also legitimacy. In the second category of *accreditation in the sending country*, home accrediting bodies help accredit cross-border programmes and institutions abroad. A study conducted by Wolff (2015) examining eight national quality assurance agencies from England, Australia, USA, Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia indicated that sending countries focused on the whole institution as review

subject instead of treating IBCs as a single entity. On the other hand, receiving countries tended to review individual programmes and small units operating in its jurisdiction at the IBC. Hou (2014) investigated the current development of national quality assurance systems in Asia and found that most local Asian quality assurance agencies had no capacity to undertake incoming and outgoing cross-border education reviews. This mismatch in both approach and capacity represents a quality challenge of both strategy and operational management in receiving countries.

Furthermore, Ziguras and McBurnie (2015) categorized four models of regulating foreign providers in receiving countries. First, in the category of *liberal regulation with minimal quality assurance*, foreign providers fall outside of the receiving government’s jurisdiction. Second, if the receiving countries welcome foreign institutions as well as developed quality assurance procedures for these providers, they belong to *liberal regulation with comprehensive assurance*. Third, in the *restrictive regulation and minimal quality assurance model*, due to the fact that IBCs are prohibited, there is no provision at all. Fourth, in the restrictive regulation and comprehensive quality assurance approach, receiving countries restrict the entry of foreign providers, but adopt quality assurance measures.

### Research method

This study adopted qualitative document analysis and in-depth interviews to explore regulation, governance, and quality assurance of IBCs in Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea. The English and Chinese documents from respective governments and branch campuses were collected and analyzed, including educational laws, quality assurance agencies’ handbooks, and university’s self-study and annual reports (Table 1). Document analysis is an approach used to gather and review the content of existing written documentation related to the study in order to extract pieces of information in a rigorous and systematic manner (Institute of Development Study 2013).

The study incorporated in-depth interviews to collect the IBC senior administrators’, quality assurance agency heads’, and experts’ opinions and perspectives towards regulation, governance, and quality assurance of IBCs in Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea. Between April 2014 and June 2016, 20 senior administrators from ten branch campuses in four nations, and 14 additional experts from Asian, UK, and USA quality assurance agencies, provided their opinions through semi-structured interviews and/or e-mail correspondence. Two quality assurance experts were interviewed using electronic interactions. Each interview lasted around 90 min. In

**Table 1** List of documents collected (Source: Authors)

University Laws	University self-study reports	QA agency’s handbooks
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Malaysian Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996</li> <li>2. Registration Status of Private Education Institutions (PEIs) in Singapore</li> <li>3. Korean Development Plan for a Global University Campus at the Incheon Songdo Free Economic Zone</li> <li>4. Korean Brain Korea 21</li> <li>5. China’s Long-term education Reform and development plan (2010–2020)</li> <li>6. China’s National medium and long-term plan for education reform and development (2010–2020)</li> <li>7. China’s Administrative measures for diplomas and degree-awarding information issued</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Higher education review of the University of Nottingham</li> <li>2. Monash University Annual report</li> <li>3. Monash University audit report</li> <li>4. Stony Brook Institutional self-study report</li> <li>5. QAA report on University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. UNESCO-APQN toolkit: regulating the quality of cross-border education</li> <li>2. ENQA toolkit for quality assurance agencies</li> <li>3. UK Quality Code for Higher Education</li> <li>4. Principles of good practice in overseas international education programs for non-U.S. national</li> <li>5. MQA Code of Practice for Institutional Audit (COPIA) and Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation</li> <li>6. QAA Malaysian branch campuses report</li> </ol>

compliance with academic ethics code, all interviewees signed consent forms before the interviews took place.

The interviews were divided into two parts. The first part focused on the senior administrators' attitudes towards the management of IBCs; their perceptions of the characteristics of IBCs; strategies for curriculum design, faculty recruitment, student admission; development of internal quality assurance mechanism; and the challenges they faced in the sustainability of an IBC. As to the interviews with quality assurance agency experts and governmental officials from sending and receiving countries, the respondents were primarily asked to share their views regarding the regulation of transnational higher education and the current approaches of IBC external reviews. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were used as the one of the major sources of data analysis. To facilitate data analysis, and avoid preconceived ideas or bias, all respondents were given a shortened code in terms of nationality, identity, and nature of organization (Bazeley and Jackson 2013) (See Table 2).

Data from interviews were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman (1994) method for generating meaning from transcribed and interview data. Their methods of noting patterns and themes; clustering items into categories; building logical chains of evidence through noting causality and making inferences; and making conceptual coherence allow typically large amounts of qualitative data to be reduced (Cohen et al. 2007). The coded qualitative data were then triangulated with the document analysis results. Triangulation, involving using multiple data sources in an investigation to produce understanding, was adopted as a method for verification of major findings (Patton 2001). The initial findings of documents and interviews were examined closely by cross-verification. Subsequent consistent data and information would directly contribute to final conclusions and findings. Those deemed inconsistent were marked and perceived as discussion points.

## Major findings

### Document analysis on national quality regulatory frameworks

Malaysia and Singapore regulated international branch campuses under laws of private higher education, in comparison, China and South Korea enacted special laws. IBCs in Malaysia were regulated as private institutions with the 1996 *Private Higher Education Institutions Act* (Laws of Malaysia 2015). In 2010, the Malaysian government granted four international branch campuses self-accrediting status, thus enabling them to provide programmes and courses without requesting Malaysia Qualification Agency (MQA) approval, while still remaining subject to MQA institutional quality assurance monitoring on a 5-year cycle. In other words, international branch campuses were given more autonomy in compliance with MQA's quality standards of *Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA)* and *Code of Practice for Institutional Audit (COPIA)* (MQA 2009).

In Singapore, regulation and quality management of IBCs was under the Private Education Act, revised in 2011 (CPE 2015a, b). The Enhanced Registration Framework (ERF) under the Council for Private Education "sets the minimum standards that all Private Education Institutions (PEIs) must meet through the mandatory registration requirements" (CPE 2016). As a private institution, IBCs are required to set up an Academic Board and an Examination Board responsible for institutional governance as well as to ensure that all teachers have relevant and authentic qualifications related to the programmes and courses.

Mainland China encouraged cross-border cooperation in higher education by issuing *The Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools Regulations of the People's Republic of China* in 2003. According to the regulations, IBCs, as independent entities, are allowed to return profits back to their home institution (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2010).

The South Korean government did not strategically attract foreign universities to come until the *Special Act on*

**Table 2** Numbers and codes of interviewees by nations, identity, and organization (Source: Authors)

Nations	No of branch campuses	No of IBCs' administrators	No of QA agencies' experts/governmental officials	IBC coding	QA coding
Malaysia	2	7	2	M1–M7	Q1–Q14
South Korea	2	4	4	K1–K4	
Singapore	2	2	1	S1–S2	
China	4	7	4	C1–C7	
Others (UK, US)	0	0	3	–	
In total	10	20	14		

*Designation and Management of Free Economic Zones* was passed in 2003. Under this law, foreign institutions were able to develop IBCs in the Free Zone with financial support from both the central and local government (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development 2005; MEST 2009).

### Deregulation policy was adopted and a joint venture was encouraged

These four nations all deregulated national educational laws and reduced taxes in order to attract top foreign providers. Some governments invited top universities to set up branches through personal or political relationship. For example, State University of New York, Korea (SUNY Korea) was invited directly by former Minister of Science, ICT and Future Planning, Mung Oh (Songdo Global University 2014) and University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus was invited directly by former Minister of Education, Najib Tun Razak (Interviewees M1 and M2). The Singapore and Malaysian governments created other incentives for foreign institutions, such as taxation and rent reductions. The South Korean government is the most generous among the four nations, investing more than 40 billion USD to build facilities and dormitories for IBCs at Incheon Economic Free Zone (MEST 2009; Byun and You 2014).

IBC in Malaysia collaborated with big corporations which provided land as well as financial support. For example, Monash University partnered with Sunway Group. Boustead Holdings Berhad and the YTL Corporation provided land for the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus (Monash University 2014). In China, the University of

Nottingham Ningbo Campus, located in the city of Ningbo, collaborated with Zhejiang Wanli Education Group as a part of joint venture (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2015; QAA 2016; Shen 2014) (Table 3).

### Governance, management, and internal quality assurance

IBCs depend heavily on local student recruitment but attempt to hire more international faculty members, frequently on local contracts due to budget constraints and control. The study found that IBCs in the four nations, usually recruited students by themselves and are not in conjunction with their home campus counterparts. In addition, local students outnumbered international students in the four countries. Take X University for example, more than 90% of enrollment was local students. But most IBCs emphasized that the students admitted were top 1–5% students at local high schools except Singapore (M4, C1, K3, and K4).

When it came to faculty recruitment, IBCs in the four nations, tended to recruit faculty globally except for a few top administrators from the home campus due to a high salary of flying faculty and budget control (M5, C2, S1, K4). Some respondents indicated that the strategy for building a successful campus was to attract the best students and faculty based on its reputation. One Malaysian interviewee indicated,

The good thing is that we are a research intensive university, so the tradition is how we create an excellent environment for our staff and students. (M2).

**Table 3** Comparisons of IBC development in the four nations (Source: Authors)

	South Korea	China	Singapore	Malaysia
Objectives	Economic growth/retain local talents/talent hub	To improve domestic higher education quality	Economic growth/attract global talents/knowledge hub	To improve education resources/education hub
Establishment	Special Act On Establishment And Management Of Foreign Educational Institutions In Free Economic Zones	Regulation of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-foreign Cooperative Education	Private Education Act, Revised Edition 2011	Private Higher Educational Institutions Act (PHEIA)
Regulations/investment	Deregulation/investing 40 billion USD	1. Deregulation 2. Partner institution is required	Taxation and rent reduction	1. Cooperation with local company or local institutions 2. The land is owned by the local company and the rents are very economic
Candidates	By invitation the top 200	Foreign universities with highly recognized academic reputation	By invitation and application both	By invitation and with alumni's recommendation and help
Location	At economic free zone	Joint campus or independent campus	Lease or own campus	Independent campus

It was also found that IBCs were established entities to develop a research culture, particularly in Malaysia; however, most of them did not have this luxury and were often limited in their ability to attract active research staff. This is a bi-product of time and maturity. An IBC is not a research intensive institution overnight and this reality can take years to develop.

Curriculum, learning outcomes, and degrees awarded meet home campus standards.

Regarding the development and implementation of curriculum, one IBC in South Korea responded that they were required to be the same as home campus.

100% is the same about the course, and the subject. So even if that kind of subject, we initiated and suggested by our faculty, we needed to report and get the approval of home campus. (K4).

Yet, Malaysian and Chinese campuses modified course content or added new courses in order to comply with host country regulations, while fulfilling home campus' requirements. As one interviewee from X University in China explained,

In response to what the Chinese government wanted and what we needed to do, such as more liberal arts, so... we would expand the areas, probably more in the arts subjects. Now we have English, and communication studies, China studies. (C1).

The Australian respondent teaching at one Malaysian branch campus also stated,

We follow the same requirements as the Australian's. The faculty members said they wanted to create a new course here, like Islamic Finance, which was very local. They put out with a proposal. They would be discussed within the same faculty at the home country. (M7).

In addition, Asian experience was integrated into curriculum design (S1). As the interviewee from an IBC in Singapore stated,

The curriculum is almost the same as in French campus. However, an emphasis of Asian experiences will assist students who came to study in Singapore to have an opportunity to connect Asia. (S2).

Learning outcomes assessment is another serious concern for IBCs. It was found that learning outcomes assessment and measures were usually the same as the home campus, in order to assist graduates to be highly competitive in global job market. It demonstrated that the degree awarded by IBCs in Singapore, Malaysia, and South Korea are the same as those from the home campuses. In addition to the degree awarded by home institution, students on Chinese campuses

are awarded the other "diploma of graduation" in the official format of China Ministry of Education. As the interviewee stated,

When the students graduate, the quality has to be the same, with it here, or Australia. So the employers will not discriminate, and would like to hire our students. It's equal to the certificate from Australia. (M1).

### Implementation of internal quality assurance mechanisms

Internal quality assurance mechanism at IBCs, in the four nations, were in place and essentially followed home campus' system according to administrators' views. All respondents from the IBCs stated that an internal quality assurance mechanism was in place, though it differed slightly in four nations in terms of maintaining programme quality in line with the home campuses. X University in China and M University in Malaysia both had well-established quality assurance mechanisms, which monitored the programmes through annual review. The professional quality assurance office at X University was mainly responsible for the quality of teaching, learning, and administration. Assessment Team at X University were required to be "in charge of all aspects of work related to examinations and assessment, including scheduling, and administration of formal examinations and all sorts of communications with students and staff in this regard, filing and maintenance of answer scripts, coordination and support of external moderation of exam papers and marking" (Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University 2016).

Every year we do what's called "external examination"; all of our assessments are looked at by a home campus moderator, an independent examiner, and a chief examiner who's independent from everything. So, our examination progress—process at the end of each year is very strict. We have to involve home campus' internal examination and overall chief external examiner. (C1).

In M University, two offices, the Education Management and Quality Assurance and Compliance units were responsible for quality-related issues on campus, which ensured university policies were "aligned with the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) and the Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF)" and their requirements (M University 2014, p. 13). Internal Quality review of S University, in compliance with the home campus accreditation, was integrated into a part of the 2014 Self-Study report of the home campus (S University 2014).

Well, as I said, the final responsibility to maintain quality and to assure the quality of education is at last with...I mean the home campus. (K3).



In order to maintain a quality campus, it is necessary to comply the standards of home campus, particularly in curriculum and program, which can't be regarded as a new form of colonialism. (S1).

### **Different external review approaches in the four nations**

#### **“Exemption” and “International accreditation” were implemented in South Korea and Singapore**

The South Korean government adopts an exemption policy, meaning that if a foreign institution is accredited by the home accreditor, its IBC will not necessarily be reviewed by a local quality assurance agency domestically. The South Korean government therefore trusts that the home country should take care of the offshore programmes and campuses. According to the official from the South Korean Ministry of Education,

They have been accredited already, you know, by the home accreditation agency. So the government will check whether the accreditation based on the home country's regulation, and accreditation data is still valid for the institution to operate offshore. (K2).

The home country than the...Korean government should concern about the screening and assuring quality process. (K1).

For example, S University only needed to be accredited by the Middle States Commission for Higher Education (MSCHE). The Korean Council for University Education (KCUE) would not undertake the review procedures over S University. However, the South Korean government attempted to assure the quality of IBCs through financial audit and facilities and equipment on site visit plan. One interviewee agreed on the policy as he indicated,

Such as S University, and G University, they kind of maintain very high level of quality assurance mechanism, so at least at this moment, I think the Minister of Education doesn't need to do much overseeing their quality. (K3).

International Accreditation is adopted by the Singapore government, meaning that either the home or the host quality assurance agency does not review IBCs in Singapore. Currently, Singapore does not have a central authority that ensures quality of higher education institutions. As the interviewee from CPE indicated,

Singapore does not have a central authority that accords recognition to certificates and/or qualifications obtained from education institutions. Recognition and acceptance of certificates for employment, further

studies or other purposes are entirely at the discretion of the individual prospective employer, education institutions or organizations. (Q13).

According to the current quality system, the CPE, unlike other accreditors, is unable to undertake a regular activity review of IBCs. IBCs are, however, required to comply with legislative requirements in order to maintain their CPE registration statuses and continue to offer courses in Singapore. Despite these processes in place, not all home accreditors will be able to review offshore programmes and IBCs. The High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education in France, for example, does not review French offshore campuses. Therefore, international accreditation becomes one of the alternatives for most IBCs in Singapore.

#### **Malaysia and China applied the ‘duplication’ and ‘home accreditor’ models**

Malaysia adopts the duplication quality assurance approach, meaning that IBCs will be reviewed by home and host countries' accreditors. The MQA started to undertake a 5-year institutional review approach to IBCs in 2010. N Malaysia Campus, before the establishment of IBC regulation in Malaysia, was approved by the home country. Subsequently, both UK QAA and MQA undertook an onsite review with different standards, respectively. M University had undergone the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) audit before it was established in Malaysia. Accordingly, MQA just undertook its institutional review on the offshore campus in 2015.

We cannot offer anything here unless it is approved in Australia first. All our programs are approved by TEQSA. So, we have to get all of them approved in M University Australia, then we bring them here through the required steps. We have to comply two systems; we have to comply the texts in Australia, we have to comply with MQA. So it's a dual, dual-system...(M3).

Although double reviews take more time and effort, they have demonstrated that a host accreditor should play its role in quality assurance of foreign providers. As one interviewee from MQA stated,

Home government should take responsibilities over branch campuses, including approval, and regular assessment. (Q12).

China is a further option as it has traditionally relied on the sending country's quality assurance agencies. It has developed its own national quality assurance agency, Higher Education Evaluation Center (HEEC), although it was not responsible for the evaluation of foreign institutions. In fact, foreign institutions were required to obtain

renewal approval from the Ministry of Education of Chinese Government through “a compulsory evaluation with nine standards, including self-evaluation, documentation review and randomly arranged visits” (Q7). The review process tended to be a type of process of formality only, and not a focus of quality improvement. As the Chinese interviewee indicated,

This is a very typical Chinese model. The whole system fails to be fully implemented and quality concern has now reduced to only formalities. (Q7).

Uh, it is not a conflict. It's just time-consuming because we have to do it twice. We have to do it in Chinese and English, but we also do it differently. On a day-to-day basis, a year-to-year basis, most of the information that we prepare is for our campus. We have to provide a lot for L University. (C2).

Different from the government-led evaluation, the Chinese Education Association for International Exchanges (CEAIE), an independent agency with Chinese government support, launched a new initiative aiming at assessing the Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions on a voluntary basis. The programmes and institutions reviewed under this process were responsible for the accreditation fees (Q7, Q11). Unlike exemption and international accreditation approaches, China is planning to develop its quality assurance capacities and subsequently undertake the review over its branch campuses. A joint accreditation between CEAIE and home accreditors is the new direction promoted by the Ministry of Education. Currently, home accreditors still take the major responsibilities for the quality assurance of IBCs in China.

### Implication of two quality provision models by Ziguras and McBurnie

Based on the analysis above, it can be determined that South Korea and Singapore fall in the category of *liberal regulation with minimal quality assurance*. They represent two governments which welcomed foreign providers without a formalized external review approach, but relied heavily on home accreditors or other international bodies accordingly. As UK and USA interviewees stated,

We realize that we are expected by host countries to do so. We do have responsibility for quality assuring the TNE provision of UK universities and we have done that since the beginning of the agency in 1997. (Q2).

The other one respondent from home country agency indicated that it was expected to get available quality information from host countries while maintaining international branch campuses' quality,

We may also have to rely more than we do at the moment on any of information is available from the quality assurance agency in the host country itself. (Q3).

I'll leave all responsibilities for the accreditor quality assurance body in the home country but collaboration with the host country. (Q1).

On the contrary, Malaysia and China fall within the category of *liberal regulation* and *restricted regulation*, respectively, but *with comprehensive quality assurance processes*, thus demonstrating that higher education and its associated quality management should fall under national jurisdiction. As one interviewee from a host country indicated,

We are the accreditation authority, and we are the gate-keeper, so we have to do our work. We can't say no to the government, also, we are not just going to rely on the American people because we're the decision-making body. (Q8).

### Collaboration among home and host accreditors: role of international networks

Collaboration between home and host accreditors, including information sharing, is a recent trend. For example, the Chinese government has forced the UK's QAA to collaborate with a local partner while undertaking external reviews. AUQA held long discussions with MQA regarding conducting joint audits, but these fell by the wayside after the establishment of TEQSA in 2012. MQA did, however, sign an agreement with QAA, discussing quality assurance of IBCs.

The challenge is to learn how to work together. And, because each has their legal agreement, and sometimes that doesn't allow for the kind of collaboration, sharing of information. (Q3).

The interviewees from quality assurance agencies suggested that international quality assurance networks could play a more active role to assist host and home countries' accreditors to overcome the obstacles. As the interviewees from both host and home countries agreed,

International networks play an important role to educate the local QA body to understand the nature of programs which can be different from the common national practice. Besides, it also functions to develop a standard approach to quality assuring campuses across countries. (Q14).

So I think the international networks can help to build trust and relationship among agencies and also help with, where possible, the conversation of frameworks. So I think they're important actors. (Q2).

## Discussion

### A balance between home quality standards and institutional autonomy

The study discovered that an integrated model of internal quality management exists within IBCs in the four Asian nations. In order to maintain the quality of offshore programmes, most IBCs implemented home campus' standards and rules into their internal quality mechanism, particularly quality manual use, curriculum approval, teaching materials import, and faculty qualifications. However, some were concerned as to whether the kind of subordinate relationship may likely lead to a loss of autonomy of the IBC as an independent institution in the host country (Altbach 2010; Lane 2013; Ziguras and McBurnie 2011).

This study shows that a well-established IBC is expected to be embedded into the local context as an independent institution. Nevertheless, a balanced internal quality assurance mechanism, equipped with international and local standards in IBCs, is needed in order to satisfy the regulations of both home and host governments as well as the standards of external accreditors.

### Leading to quality colonialism?

In addition to an internal quality management, a quality IBC must also be reviewed by an external quality assurance system, which "often entails the careful scrutiny and adaptation of quality control mechanisms (both internal and external) that are designed to operate in one jurisdiction (the home country) to those that will also work in the host country" (Coelen 2014, p. 24). This study found that the four nations have different solutions and quality management policies with respect to IBCs. Irrespective of the approach adopted, collaborations between home and host quality assurance agencies have not yet fully emerged. There are four major reasons for a lack of advanced collaborations or joint accreditations, including (1) skepticism of assessments by other entities; (2) too much trust towards the home accreditor; (3) absence of a national quality assurance agency; and (4) lack of capacity on part of local accreditor (Kinser and Lane 2013). It will likely take time for the home or host accreditors to understand and work with each other's national quality regulations and standards.

There is no explicit reference regarding who should take responsibility for the external review of IBCs, as long as an agency or institution does so. However, it was found in the study that the home accreditor should take the primary responsibility, owing to the lack of a regulatory framework

for cross-border higher education in some Asian countries. When heavy reliance on western accreditors' review continues, the question as to whether it will lead to "quality colonialism or imperialism" in the host countries should be investigated in the future (Hou 2014).

### Is joint accreditation a solution?

An examination of current quality assurance developments in four Asian nations makes it apparent that there are no specific policies and standards for IBCs. This study discovered that a joint or collaborative accreditation was highly expected from quality assurance agencies' and universities' perspectives. This approach would avoid excessive administrative workloads as well as support the capacity building of host accreditors. Clearly, evaluating the quality of transnational higher education requires a joint effort between home countries and host countries in order to scrutinize multi-dimensional developments of IBCs. This necessity remains a challenge. Several obstacles need to be overcome, such as varying legal and licensing requirements at the home and host countries; lack of transparent quality assurance information; limited interactions and trust between quality assurance agencies; and language barriers. As Kinser (2011) stated, "Until the extent of cross-border trust matches that of cross-border higher education, a truly multinational quality assurance regime remains hypothetical" (p. 63).

## Conclusion

Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea clearly view IBCs as one of the most important strategies for the promotion of higher education competitiveness. They likewise understand that prestigious foreign universities can offer top international curriculum, recruit well-known faculty, nurture local human capital, as well as attract greater numbers of international students. Quality regulation of IBCs, in the four nations examined in this study, varies slightly in terms of internal and external mechanisms. This research found that an inclusive model of internal quality mechanism has been developed in the four Asian nations. By contrast, the approaches of external quality assurance for IBCs in the four countries are quite diverse, including exemption, reliance on home country's accreditor, duplication, and international accreditation.

In order to maintain the integrity and quality of the programmes, home campuses must absolutely conduct quality assurance and establish certain requirements for IBCs. Furthermore, host countries are obligated to ensure the quality of higher education on their soil. There has to be mutual respect for each other's accreditation authorities.

Given the perception that both home and host countries are required to share responsibility for ensuring the quality of IBCs, conducting a joint or collaborative review is considered one of the alternatives to promote this reality. Asian nations could therefore seek cooperation with agencies of sending countries “with a view to avoiding regulatory gaps and duplication of efforts, and to lessening the regulatory burdens on providers” (ENQA 2015, p. 7).

A well-established quality assurance system will significantly contribute to the sustainability of transnational higher education. Maintaining the quality of IBCs in Asia remains a significant challenge due to an over-reliance on sending countries and a lack of international capacity by some local accreditors. As a result, the development of IBCs can take many different forms, have different levels of risk, and develop varying levels of impact and value to the home and host nation. Irrespective of the model, structure, and reality of the IBCs, a well-balanced quality assurance system of cross-border education must be in place in order to safeguard the degree offered, the reputation of the sending countries, and the overall higher education quality and value at receiving countries.

**Funding** The funding was provided by Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan (Grant No. MOST 103-2410-H-030-052).

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