

# ECONOMIC SCIENCES

## FROM ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS TO DIGITAL INNOVATION HUBS: THE TRANSFORMATION OF BUSINESS SCHOOL – CORPORATE ECOSYSTEMS IN CHINA

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### Abstract

The rapid development of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and platform-based business models has fundamentally transformed the role of business schools in the global knowledge economy. Contemporary business schools are increasingly moving beyond their traditional educational functions and evolving into digital innovation hubs that connect academic knowledge, corporate expertise, technological infrastructure, and executive learning ecosystems. This study investigates the transformation of business school–corporate interaction in China through a comparative analysis of three leading institutions: China Europe International Business School (CEIBS), Tsinghua University School of Economics and Management (Tsinghua SEM), and PKU Guanghua School of Management. Using a mixed-method research design that combines comparative analysis, content analysis, KPI assessment, and ROI evaluation, the study examines how digital governance mechanisms, AI-driven analytics, executive education platforms, and strategic partnerships contribute to institutional competitiveness and corporate integration. The findings demonstrate that digital transformation has enabled Chinese business schools to establish highly institutionalized corporate ecosystems characterized by strong industry collaboration, internationalization, lifelong learning infrastructures, and data-driven management systems. The study argues that the Chinese model represents a new stage in the evolution of business education, where universities function as strategic partners in corporate innovation and talent development. Practical implications for the modernization of business education systems in Kazakhstan and other emerging economies are discussed.

**Keywords:** digital transformation, business schools, executive education, corporate ecosystems, digital governance, artificial intelligence, corporate partnerships, innovation hubs.

### Introduction

The global transition toward a digital economy has generated profound changes in higher education systems, particularly in institutions responsible for preparing managerial and entrepreneurial talent. Business schools are experiencing unprecedented pressure to adapt their educational models to rapidly changing technological environments, evolving labor market demands, and the growing importance of digital competencies [1-3]. Traditional business education models based primarily on classroom instruction are increasingly being replaced by flexible, technology-enabled ecosystems that integrate academic knowledge, corporate practice, and digital innovation.

The emergence of artificial intelligence, big data analytics, cloud-based learning platforms, and digital collaboration technologies has significantly altered the mechanisms through which business schools interact with corporate stakeholders. As a result, the concept of business school–corporate interaction has evolved from conventional internship and recruitment arrangements toward comprehensive partnership ecosystems encompassing executive education, joint research initiatives, consulting activities, innovation laboratories, and digital learning environments [4,5]. China represents one of the most dynamic examples of this transformation. During the past two decades, Chinese business schools have achieved remarkable progress in international rankings and have established themselves as influential actors within the global business education landscape. Institutions such as CEIBS, Tsinghua SEM, and PKU

Guanghua School of Management have developed sophisticated models of corporate engagement supported by digital governance systems, AI-enabled educational technologies, and extensive international partnerships [6-9].

### Literature Review

The digital transformation of higher education has become one of the most extensively discussed topics in contemporary educational and management research. The emergence of artificial intelligence, learning analytics, cloud-based educational environments, and platform ecosystems has significantly altered the traditional functions of universities and business schools. Modern business schools are increasingly expected to provide not only academic knowledge but also practical competencies, digital skills, innovation capabilities, and strategic leadership competencies required in the contemporary corporate environment [1,4,5].

Scholars argue that digitalization has transformed universities into active participants in innovation ecosystems [10]. According to ecosystem theory, educational institutions no longer operate as isolated organizations but as interconnected actors within broader networks that include corporations, government agencies, research centers, technology providers, and international partners. Within this framework, business schools play a particularly important role because they serve as intermediaries between knowledge production and business practice.

The concept of business school–corporate interaction has evolved substantially during the last two decades. Traditional forms of cooperation, including internships, guest lectures, and recruitment activities, have gradually been replaced by more integrated partnership models. These models involve executive education programs, corporate consulting, joint research centers, innovation laboratories, startup accelerators, digital learning platforms, and strategic talent development initiatives [10, 11].

The emergence of Executive Education Ecosystems has further strengthened collaboration between business schools and corporations. Executive education is increasingly recognized as a strategic instrument for organizational transformation, leadership development, and innovation management. Unlike traditional degree programs, executive education provides flexible learning opportunities tailored to the specific needs of corporate clients [12,13].

Artificial intelligence has become another important factor shaping the evolution of business education. AI-driven analytics enables institutions to monitor student engagement, personalize learning pathways, predict educational outcomes, and improve decision-making processes. Research indicates that AI-based educational technologies enhance learning effectiveness while simultaneously improving institutional efficiency.

Chinese business schools represent a unique case in the global business education landscape. During the last twenty years, institutions such as CEIBS, Tsinghua SEM, and PKU Guanghua have achieved significant progress in international rankings and accreditation systems. Their success has been largely attributed to the integration of digital governance mechanisms, strategic corporate partnerships, and innovation-oriented educational models [14,15].

The literature suggests that successful business school transformation depends on several interrelated factors: digital platform integration, internationalization, executive education development, corporate partnership intensity, innovation ecosystem participation, and research collaboration. However, relatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how these factors interact within integrated business school–corporate ecosystems. This study contributes to the literature by examining these relationships within the context of leading Chinese business schools.

### Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The

methodological framework was developed to capture both the institutional characteristics of Chinese business schools and the strategic mechanisms underlying their corporate partnerships [16].

The research consists of three interconnected stages.

The first stage involved a comparative institutional analysis of three leading Chinese business schools: China Europe International Business School (CEIBS), Tsinghua University School of Economics and Management (Tsinghua SEM), and PKU Guanghua School of Management. These institutions were selected because of their international reputation, accreditation status, strong corporate partnerships, and advanced digital learning infrastructures.

The second stage included content analysis of official institutional documents, executive education materials, annual reports, accreditation reports, corporate partnership policies, and publicly available strategic documents. Content analysis enabled the identification of recurring themes and strategic priorities associated with business school – corporate interaction [6,8,9].

The third stage involved quantitative assessment using KPI and ROI frameworks. Performance indicators were developed to evaluate the effectiveness of executive education ecosystems and corporate partnership management systems [13].

The KPI model was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{KPI} = (\text{Actual Performance} / \text{Target Performance}) \times 100$$

The ROI model was calculated as:

$$\text{ROI} = ((\text{Net Benefit} - \text{Investment Cost}) / \text{Investment Cost}) \times 100$$

The study also employed comparative scoring techniques to assess institutional performance across six strategic dimensions:

- Digital Platform Integration;
- Internationalization;
- Corporate Partnerships;
- Executive Education Development;
- Research Collaboration;
- Innovation Ecosystem Participation.

Scores were normalized on a 100-point scale to facilitate comparison among institutions.

### Results

The analysis demonstrates that Chinese business schools have successfully transformed from traditional educational institutions into complex corporate learning ecosystems.

Table 1.

**Comparative Assessment of Strategic Development Indicators**

| Indicator                          | CEIBS | Tsinghua SEM | PKU Guanghua |
|------------------------------------|-------|--------------|--------------|
| Digital Platform Integration       | 92    | 95           | 88           |
| Internationalization               | 96    | 82           | 80           |
| Corporate Partnerships             | 91    | 93           | 86           |
| Executive Education Development    | 95    | 89           | 84           |
| Research Collaboration             | 88    | 91           | 93           |
| Innovation Ecosystem Participation | 90    | 94           | 87           |

The findings indicate that Tsinghua SEM demonstrates the strongest performance in digital transformation and innovation ecosystem development. Its close collaboration with technology companies and AI-oriented industries provides a significant competitive advantage [8,13,18].

CEIBS achieved the highest scores in internationalization and executive education development. The institution has successfully established a global executive education platform supported by extensive multinational corporate partnerships and international faculty networks [6,7,12,17].

PKU Guanghua exhibited superior performance in research collaboration. The institution's strategy focuses on integrating academic research with corporate innovation activities through joint research centers and innovation laboratories [9,19,20].

The results also demonstrate substantial institutional convergence. All three schools have established highly developed digital learning environments and maintain active participation in corporate governance processes through advisory boards and strategic partnerships.

Table 2.

| KPI Assessment of Executive Education Ecosystems |                    |                    |         |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------|
| Institution                                      | Actual Performance | Target Performance | KPI (%) |
| CEIBS                                            | 92                 | 100                | 92      |
| Tsinghua SEM                                     | 95                 | 100                | 95      |
| PKU Guanghua                                     | 88                 | 100                | 88      |

Tsinghua SEM achieved the highest KPI score, reflecting its strong digital governance architecture and technology-driven educational model [8,13].

Table 3.

| ROI Assessment of Executive Education Programs |                           |                               |         |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|
| Institution                                    | Net Benefit (USD million) | Investment Cost (USD million) | ROI (%) |
| CEIBS                                          | 18.5                      | 10.0                          | 85.0    |
| Tsinghua SEM                                   | 21.3                      | 11.5                          | 85.2    |
| PKU Guanghua                                   | 15.4                      | 9.0                           | 71.1    |

The ROI analysis demonstrates that executive education programs generate substantial value for corporate stakeholders. Tsinghua SEM achieved the highest return due to strong integration between executive education and innovation ecosystems [6,8].

### Discussion

The findings reveal several important trends shaping the future of business education.

First, Chinese business schools have moved beyond the traditional educational paradigm and adopted ecosystem-based governance models [10-16]. Within these models, business schools function as strategic coordinators connecting corporations, students, researchers, technology providers, and international partners.

Second, digital transformation has become the primary driver of institutional competitiveness. Digital platforms facilitate continuous interaction between business schools and corporate stakeholders, enabling real-time knowledge exchange and flexible executive learning.

Third, AI technologies increasingly influence educational decision-making processes. Institutions that effectively integrate AI-driven analytics demonstrate higher levels of operational efficiency and educational effectiveness [1,4,5].

Fourth, executive education has emerged as a central component of business school strategy. Unlike conventional degree programs, executive education creates long-term relationships with corporate clients and generates sustainable revenue streams.

The comparative analysis also reveals distinct institutional specialization patterns. CEIBS focuses on

internationalization and executive leadership development; Tsinghua SEM emphasizes technological innovation and AI integration; PKU Guanghua prioritizes research-driven corporate collaboration.

These differences suggest that successful business school ecosystems can be developed through multiple strategic pathways. There is no universal model of excellence; rather, institutional success depends on alignment between organizational capabilities, market positioning, and strategic priorities.

The Chinese experience also provides important insights for emerging economies. The integration of digital governance, corporate partnerships, and executive education can significantly enhance institutional competitiveness and support national innovation strategies.

### Conclusion

This study examined the transformation of business school – corporate ecosystems in China through the comparative analysis of CEIBS, Tsinghua SEM, and PKU Guanghua School of Management.

The results indicate that Chinese business schools have successfully evolved into digital innovation hubs characterized by advanced governance systems, strong corporate partnerships, extensive executive education ecosystems, and high levels of digital integration.

The research confirms that digital transformation, AI-driven analytics, executive education development, and strategic corporate collaboration constitute the main determinants of institutional competitiveness in contemporary business education.

The KPI and ROI analyses demonstrate that corporate partnership ecosystems generate significant educational, managerial, and economic benefits for participating stakeholders. Executive education programs, in particular, have become important instruments for leadership development, organizational innovation, and corporate transformation.

The findings suggest that universities seeking to strengthen their competitive position should prioritize digital governance, ecosystem-based partnership models, AI integration, and lifelong learning infrastructures.

For Kazakhstan and other emerging economies, the Chinese experience offers a valuable framework for modernizing business education systems and enhancing collaboration between universities and the corporate sector. Future research may expand the comparative analysis to include European and North American business schools and examine the long-term impact of AI technologies on executive education ecosystems.

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