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UNNC-NBU, Doctoral Training Partnership

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Research areas

- Applied Economics
- Business Administration
- Management Science

Potential PhD topics

PhD topic	Collective Springboarding and Supply-Chain Ecosystem Co-Migration by Chinese Firms under Geopolitical Fragmentation
NBU Supervisor	Prof. Xinmin Peng
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Dr Yanze Liang
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	Chinese firms are increasingly expanding overseas not as isolated companies but as interconnected business ecosystems. A lead firm may establish production in a host country while key suppliers, logistics providers and complementary partners follow, reproducing parts of the home-country value chain abroad rather than relying entirely on local partners. This pattern is increasingly visible among Chinese firms in sectors such as electric vehicles, batteries, renewable energy and advanced manufacturing. While existing internationalization research has examined firm-level foreign investment and “follow-the-customer” investment, less attention has been paid to how firms coordinate overseas expansion collectively. Building on recent developments in springboard theory and research on paradoxes, this PhD project examines collective springboarding as an organizationally constructed form of internationalization. It will investigate how overseas coalitions are formed and governed, why firms co-locate or sequence their international expansion, and how these arrangements support capability development and international growth under geopolitical uncertainty. A central tension concerns the benefits and liabilities of going abroad together: expanding with familiar partners may reduce coordination and supply-chain risks and facilitate capability deployment, while simultaneously limiting local embeddedness and increasing origin-based scrutiny in host countries. The project will examine how Chinese firms manage this tension and whether different coalition arrangements enable latecomer firms to sustain international growth under increasing

	geopolitical fragmentation. It may combine FDI and buyer-supplier network data with comparative case studies and interviews.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Dr Yanze Liang (yanze.liang@nottingham.edu.cn) and Prof Xinmin Peng (pengxinmin@nbu.edu.cn).
PhD topic	Chinese firms' strategies and innovation under geopolitical tensions
NBU Supervisor	Professor Xinmin Peng
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Professor Abby Zhou
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	In recent years, escalating geopolitical tensions, including trade conflicts, technological nationalism, and economic sanctions, have fundamentally reshaped the global business environment. Chinese firms, particularly those operating in strategically important industries such as technology, advanced manufacturing, and emerging sectors, face unprecedented challenges in accessing global markets, acquiring critical resources, and maintaining international competitiveness. This PhD project aims to explore how Chinese firms strategically respond to geopolitical tensions and how these external constraints influence their innovation activities, international strategies, and capability development. Specifically, the project seeks to uncover how firms interpret, adapt to, and potentially transform geopolitical challenges into opportunities for strategic renewal and innovation. Drawing on the literature of international business, emerging market multinational enterprises (EMNEs), and dynamic capabilities, this project investigates the mechanisms through which Chinese firms develop new capabilities and innovation strategies under conditions of geopolitical uncertainty. The expected contribution of this research is to develop a more nuanced understanding of firm behavior in an era of geopolitical disruption by explaining when and how geopolitical constraints stimulate, hinder, or redirect innovation and strategic transformation. The findings will contribute to international business and strategic management research while providing practical implications for firms and policymakers seeking to enhance resilience, technological capabilities, and long-term competitiveness in a changing global environment.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Xinmin Peng (pengxinmin@nbu.edu.cn) and Abby Zhou (abby.zhou@nottingham.edu.cn).
PhD topic	From Sharing to Identity: Tourists' Strategic Self-Presentation in Slow Tourism
NBU Supervisor	Dr. Hao Ji
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Prof. Yangyang JIANG
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	A new form of travel sharing is emerging on social media platforms: tourists are increasingly displaying "imperfect" moments to implicitly signal spiritual transformation and authenticity, rather than overtly flaunting aesthetic appeal. This shift provides an opportunity to reconceptualise self-presentation theory beyond visual aesthetics. This project will focus on two major dimensions: (i) strategic self-presentation mechanisms—examining how explicit visual strategies and implicit narrative strategies differentially translate sharing motives into identity claims; and (ii) contextual variation—investigating how tourists' effort levels in slow tourism destinations shape their choice of self-presentation strategies and the resulting identity construction outcomes.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Prof. Yangyang Jiang (Yangyang.Jiang@nottingham.edu.cn) and Dr. Hao Ji (jihao@nbu.edu.cn).

PhD topic	AI-Driven Digital Finance and Firm Growth from the Perspective of Stable and Sustainable Development: Research on Micro-mechanisms, Macro-effects, and Optimization Strategies
NBU Supervisor	Assoc. Prof. Hongya Li
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Assoc. Prof. Haibo Xu
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	In the context of promoting the deep integration of real economy and digital economy, the rapidly developing digital finance, particularly driven by artificial intelligence (AI), has provided new impetus for the size growth and quality improvement of Chinese firms. However, the risks and regional imbalances in the development of digital finance have become key issues that hinder the full play of digital finance's role. Based on a perspective of stable and sustainable development, this project combines micro and macro perspectives to explore the positive impact of AI-driven digital finance on firm growth, analyse the potential negative impacts of imbalances and risks in digital finance development on firm growth, and incorporate "financial support", "digital empowerment", and "technology drive" into a unified framework based on the firm's production theory model to explore the micro-mechanism of digital finance's impact on firm growth. It analyses the moderating effects and heterogeneous characteristics of marketization, openness, economic development, and financial supervision, explores the macroeconomic effects of digital finance through its impact on firm size distribution based on a heterogeneous firm's model, and conducts empirical research using cutting-edge econometric methods. Based on this, optimization strategy suggestions are proposed. The research of this project can provide theoretical and empirical basis for promoting the rapid, stable, and sustainable development of AI-driven digital finance to facilitate firm growth, promote the rationalization and optimization of firm size structure, and enhance economic resilience. It can also provide decision-making references for the formulation and implementation of relevant policies.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Assoc. Prof. Haibo Xu (Haibo.Xu@nottingham.edu.cn) and Assoc. Prof. Hongya LI (lihongya@nbu.edu.cn).
PhD topic	Regional ESG System, Sustainable Development, and Corporate Sustainability
NBU Supervisor	Prof. Rulong ZHUANG
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Dr. Saileshsingh Gunessee
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	To successfully promote regional sustainable development (city-level) and corporate sustainability (firm-level), an efficient regional environmental, social, and governance (ESG) system is needed. This means the institutional and regulatory systems underpinning the regional-level ESG ought to function with clear government objectives, policy coupling, and effective implementation. Yet, the current ESG system is reported to have structural contradictions, epitomized by fragmentation, limited coupling, conflicting governance objectives, and deviations in institutional implementation. It stands to reason that this 'state of affairs' seriously hinders the realization of an efficient ESG system, which can impede regional sustainable development and corporate sustainability. Drawing on institutional and political economy perspectives, the proposed thesis will examine several research objectives on this theme. • The first objective is to quantify the level of coupling and coordination among the environmental regulation, social governance, and public governance systems, and to identify mismatch nodes and governance conflicts within the ESG system. This can enable exploration of the core driving mechanism of institutional coupling optimization and conflict resolution to correct resource misallocation, improve the efficiency of green

	governance, enhance the quality of sustainable development, and identify institutional and market barriers that impede the implementation of regional ESG systems. • The second objective is to examine whether the regional ESG governance system shapes regional (city-level) sustainable development (significant or not), if so, how (mechanism) and when (under what conditions). • The third objective is to investigate whether the regional ESG governance system shapes corporate sustainability (significant or not), if so, how (mechanism) and when (under what conditions). This research should enrich our understanding of the regional ESG governance system and its influence on shaping regional and corporate sustainability. It should also inform practitioner-policy debate about the effectiveness of the current ESG system and how to improve it, whilst also informing practitioner-managerial implications of how firms' resources could be managed in light of the ESG system.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Saileshsingh GUNESSEE (saileshsingh.gunessee@nottingham.edu.cn) and Rulong ZHUANG (zrlmkn@163.com).
PhD topic	Dynamic Resource Allocation in Reservation-Based EV Charging
NBU Supervisor	Prof. Rulong ZHUANG
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Dr. Huan Jin
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	EV charging demand is highly heterogeneous, driven by diverse vehicle types (private, commercial, public transit) and user preferences regarding speed, cost, and waiting time. This PhD project aims to characterize these heterogeneous preferences to enable dynamic resource allocation under reservation-based EV charging systems. Based on a thorough analysis of the spatio-temporal distribution, regional planning and utilization status of diverse electric-vehicle charging facilities, the candidate will investigate how vehicle types, user behaviors, and reservation strategies jointly affect charging-facility choice, vehicle–charger matching, and dynamic power allocation. The overarching goal is to enhance service efficiency while ensuring fairness across diverse user groups. Candidate Requirements: • Academic Background: Master’s degree in Computer Science, Transportation Engineering, Operations Research, Industrial Engineering, Applied Mathematics, or closely related fields. • Technical Skills: Strong foundation in mathematical modeling and optimization (e.g., integer programming, stochastic optimization, queuing theory). Proficiency in Python, C++, or MATLAB. • Preferred Qualifications: Experience with EV charging networks, smart transportation, simulation tools, or data-driven analysis is a strong plus. • Soft Skills: Excellent analytical problem-solving abilities and proficiency in academic English (written and spoken).
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Huan Jin (Huan.jin@nottingham.edu.cn) and Rulong Zhuang (zrlmkn@163.com).
PhD topic	Coupling Adaptation Mechanism of Environmental Institutional Innovation and Green Technology Governance and Its Industrial Low-Carbon Transformation Effect
NBU Supervisor	Prof. Rulong ZHUANG

UNNC Supervisor(s)	Dr. Marina Glushenkova https://research.nottingham.edu.cn/en/persons/marina-glushenkova/
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	Integrating the theories of institutional economics and industrial economics, this thesis focuses on the adaptation of environmental institutional supply and green technology governance, and explores the long-term driving mechanism of their coupling on the dynamic low-carbon transformation of industries. The positive adaptation between institutions and technologies is the core driving force for industrial green and low-carbon transformation. Current academic research generally has a deviation of "emphasizing single policy effect while ignoring institution-technology matching", while a growing body of literature examines coupling coordination, the broader institution-technology matching, particularly the dynamic fit between the entire institutional environment and SME-level technological capabilities, remains underexplored. Existing studies neglect practical problems such as mismatch, lag and insufficient coordination between environmental institutional innovation and green technology governance, which cannot explain the differentiated results of industrial low-carbon transformation in different industries and firm types, particularly the structural constraints facing Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), including limited financial access, weaker absorptive capacity, and disproportionate compliance cost burdens. This study constructs an institution-technology coupling coordination evaluation system to quantify the adaptation level of environmental institutional innovation and green technology governance. From the perspective of industrial dynamic evolution, it systematically tests the effect and heterogeneous characteristics of their coupling on industrial technological progress, industrial structure optimization and iterative green behavior of enterprises. Using dynamic panel threshold regression models, it identifies critical stringency thresholds beyond which coupling effects shift for SMEs. It identifies market frictions and institutional bottlenecks—including local governance misalignment and SME-exclusionary green finance schemes—that restrict the collaborative adaptation of institutions and technologies. It further incorporates domestic and international integration as a key moderating dimension, testing whether coupling efficiency is amplified in more deeply integrated regions and whether integration itself exhibits threshold behavior, and constructs a long-term evolution mechanism of "institutional innovation – SME green capability building – industrial low-carbon restructuring" suitable for different industrial types and integration contexts. This research enriches the theoretical system of institutional industrial economics under the background of green transformation by introducing SME heterogeneity, integration moderation, and threshold dynamics into the coupling framework—dimensions currently underexplored in the literature. It provides a new analytical paradigm for countries to optimize environmental institutional supply, accurately match green technology governance systems, promote the low-carbon and high-quality transformation of the real economy, and calibrate policies to avoid regulatory overload that undermines SME viability.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Marina Glushenkova (marina.glushenkova@nottingham.edu.cn) and Rulong ZHUANG (zrlmkn@163.com).
PhD topic	AI and Corporate Governance: The Role of Algorithmic Accountability in Board Decision-Making
NBU Supervisor	Professor Qigui Liu
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Professor Wei Huang

Short introduction & description of the PhD project	As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly embedded in strategic decision-making processes, a critical research direction at the intersection of AI and corporate governance is: "Algorithmic Accountability in Boardroom Decisions: Evaluating the Impact of AI-Driven Insights on Director Oversight and Fiduciary Responsibility." This research direction explores how the integration of AI tools—such as predictive analytics, natural language processing for risk assessment, and machine learning models for performance forecasting—affects the governance role of corporate boards. Specifically, it investigates whether and how reliance on AI-generated recommendations alters directors’ exercise of fiduciary duties, including the duty of care and duty of loyalty. Key research questions include: 1.How does the use of AI in strategic planning influence board deliberation dynamics and decision transparency? 2.What governance mechanisms are necessary to ensure algorithmic accountability and prevent over-reliance on opaque models? 3.In what ways do AI systems challenge traditional notions of director independence and informed judgment? 4.How should regulatory frameworks evolve to address liability when AI-informed decisions lead to corporate misconduct or financial loss?
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Qigui Liu (liuqigui@nbu.edu.cn) and Wei Huang (wei.huang@nottingham.edu.cn).
PhD topic	AI Algorithmic Resistance in Intelligent Recommendation Systems: Endogenous Risks, Evolutionary Dynamics, and Adaptive Governance
NBU Supervisor	Prof. Chengyi LE
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Dr. Huan Jin
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	Intelligent recommendation algorithms have reshaped how users consume information on social media. However, while enhancing efficiency, the "black-box" nature, excessive personalization, and data control inherent in these algorithms have increasingly led to human-AI conflicts. Consequently, users are shifting from passive acceptance to diverse "algorithmic resistance" behaviors, such as algorithmic evasion, strategic manipulation, and active defiance. This project aims to investigate algorithmic resistance not merely as a temporary user reaction, but as an endogenous risk deeply embedded within the human-AI interaction system. The PhD candidate will have the opportunity to explore this phenomenon through a holistic perspective, focusing on three major dimensions: (i) Risk Identification & Mechanisms: Understanding how specific technical features (e.g., hyper-personalization, filter bubbles) translate into psychological risks and trigger different types of user resistance. (ii) Dynamic Evolution: Tracking the non-linear relationship (e.g., the tipping point between personalization and privacy concerns) and the temporal evolution of user resistance across different interaction stages. (iii) Adaptive Governance & Human-AI Collaboration: Developing data-driven risk stratification models and designing adaptive intervention strategies (e.g., cognitive transparency and user empowerment) to mitigate risks and foster a healthy human-AI ecosystem.

	This project provides an excellent opportunity to bridge Information Systems (IS) user behavior, and dynamic psychology, offering theoretical breakthroughs and practical solutions for building a healthy, human-AI symbiotic digital ecology. Applicants should hold a Master's degree in Information Systems, HCI, Data Science, or related fields. The ideal candidate will have a strong foundation in user behavior research and quantitative data analysis (including statistical modeling or machine learning). Proficiency in English, interdisciplinary thinking, and a keen interest in algorithmic governance and human-AI interaction are essential. Experience with experimental design or longitudinal tracking is highly advantageous.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Chengyi Le (Lechengyi@nbu.edu.cn) and Huan Jin (Huan.jin@nottingham.edu.cn).
PhD topic	Infrastructure Connectivity and Factor Allocation Efficiency: Labor and Capital Misallocation across Chinese Prefectures
NBU Supervisor	Prof. Mengting Zhang
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Dr. Marina Glushenkova (Assistant Professor in Economics) https://research.nottingham.edu.cn/en/persons/marina-glushenkova/
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	China's rapid expansion of transport infrastructure, led by the high-speed railway network and urban metro systems, has fundamentally reshaped the spatial configuration of economic activity. Yet how far improved transport connectivity actually improves the efficiency with which labor and capital are allocated across regions remains an open and policy-relevant question. Factor misallocation across firms, industries and prefectures is widely regarded as a primary source of aggregate productivity loss in China, and transport accessibility is one of the most direct levers for reducing the spatial frictions that underpin it. This PhD project investigates the causal effects of transport infrastructure connectivity on labor and capital allocation efficiency across Chinese prefectures. Exploiting quasi-natural experiments such as high-speed rail openings and metro expansion, and combining spatial econometrics with firm-level and prefecture-level microdata, it seeks to quantify how improved market access reduces factor misallocation, to identify the underlying channels (market access, commuting costs, financing constraints and factor mobility), and to assess the consequences for regional productivity, income convergence and common prosperity. The project sits at the intersection of transport economics, spatial and regional economics, and international trade. It integrates the rigorous empirical research paradigm of the UK system with China's practical policy context, offering both a frontier academic contribution and concrete guidance for infrastructure investment and coordinated regional development.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Mengting Zhang (zhangmengting@nbu.edu.cn) or Marina Glushenkova (marina.glushenkova@nottingham.edu.cn)
PhD topic	Transport Infrastructure Connectivity, Productivity, and Firm Internationalization
NBU Supervisor	Prof. Mengting Zhang
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Dr. Saileshsingh Gunessee
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	Transport infrastructure connectivity has long been recognized as a core component of regional and national competitiveness across various Competitiveness Frameworks. Economic prosperity has been linked to transport infrastructure connectivity through this competitiveness/productivity link. Not surprisingly, academic literature has examined the role of transport infrastructure (in its various facets) and its effects on various macro-level

	outcomes (e.g., economic growth). Less well known is the role of transport infrastructure connectivity in industrial restructuring (e.g., factor allocation, industrial clustering) and firm internationalization (e.g., exporting and FDI), through this productivity channel. This proposed thesis seeks to answer questions about the effects of transport infrastructure connectivity on industrial and firm outcomes. Drawing on international economics and regional economics perspectives, the proposed thesis will examine several research objectives on this theme. • The first objective is to quantify the relationship between (prefecture-level) transport infrastructure connectivity in its various facets and industrial factor resource allocation and market competition, and firm markup, innovation, and productivity. In particular, the individual role of high-speed railway, road access, shipping & waterways, and air access is of interest. Of additional interest is the exploration of the roles of agglomeration economies, market access, and spillovers in relation to the infrastructure connectivity-productivity relationship. • The second objective is to examine whether the (prefecture-level) transport infrastructure connectivity shapes firms' exports and export quality upgrading (significant or not), if so, how (mechanism) and when (under what conditions). As a connection to the first objective, an examination would be conducted to identify whether a causal link exists <i>through</i> the productivity channel. The plan also includes exploring the role of specific infrastructure modes and exports by type. • The third objective is to investigate whether the (prefecture-level) transport infrastructure connectivity shapes firm OFDI decision (significant or not), if so, through which mechanism (how) and when (under what conditions). As a connection to the first objective, an examination would be conducted to establish whether a causal link exists <i>through</i> the productivity channel. The plan also includes exploring the role of specific infrastructure modes and comparing the export vs. OFDI decision. This research should enrich our understanding of how infrastructure connectivity affects industrial restructuring and firms' internationalization decisions through the channels of productivity and competitiveness. This should inform the practitioner-policy debate about the effectiveness of transport infrastructure networks and how to improve them, whilst also informing practitioner-managerial implications for how firms can deploy their resources in light of infrastructure connectivity to achieve efficiency.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Mengting ZHANG (zhangmengting@nbu.edu.cn) or Saileshsingh GUNESSEE (saileshsingh.gunessee@nottingham.edu.cn)
PhD topic	AI-Driven Corporate Finance: Intelligent Analytics for M&A, Corporate Governance, and ESG
NBU Supervisor	Dr Liya Hau Associate Professor
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Dr Xiaogang Bi Associate Professor
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the landscape of corporate finance. Traditional corporate finance research has largely relied on structured financial data and classical econometric models, leaving vast amounts of unstructured data, as well as complex inter-corporate relational information, largely underexplored. Cutting-edge technologies including machine learning, knowledge graphs, and digital twins offer novel methodological pathways to address these limitations. This PhD project aims to develop an AI-driven intelligent analytics framework for corporate finance, with a focus on the core domains including mergers and acquisitions (M&A), corporate governance, ESG, and so on. The research outcomes are expected to

	enhance the scientific rigor of M&A decision-making, improve corporate governance mechanisms, and advance the quantitative assessment of ESG investing, offering contributions of both theoretical depth and practical value to academia and industry. The specific research topic will be finalized upon the students' enrolment, taking into account the student's research interests and the supervisory team's expertise.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Dr. Xiaogang Bi (X.Bi@nottingham.edu.cn) and Dr. Liya Hao (haoliya@nbu.edu.cn).
PhD topic	Artificial Intelligence, Corporate Finance and Capital Market Innovation: Evidence from Chinese Firms
NBU Supervisor	Prof. Xinmiao Zhou
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Dr. XiaoGang Bi , Associate Professor in Finance
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics and digital technologies is reshaping corporate decision-making, financial markets and investment activities. This PhD project aims to investigate how emerging technologies influence corporate finance decisions, capital market efficiency and financial innovation in the context of Chinese firms. The project will focus on several potential research directions, including the application of machine learning and artificial intelligence in corporate finance, the impact of digital transformation on firm performance and financing decisions, the role of institutional investors and financial intermediaries in capital market development, and the use of quantitative methods for investment and risk management. Drawing on expertise in corporate finance, mergers and acquisitions, institutional investors, managerial teams and quantitative investment strategies, the project will combine financial econometrics, big data analysis and machine learning approaches to explore how technological innovation transforms corporate governance, investment decisions and financial markets. The research is expected to provide both theoretical contributions and practical implications for enterprises, financial institutions and policymakers, particularly in understanding how Chinese firms can leverage digital technologies to improve financial decision-making and achieve sustainable development.
Contact points	Prof. Xinmiao Zhou (Ningbo University): zhouxinmiao@nbu.edu.cn Dr. XiaoGang Bi (Nottingham University Business School China): X.Bi@nottingham.edu.cn
PhD topic	Generative AI, Skill Reallocation, and Wage Inequality Skill-Job Matching and Performance
NBU Supervisor	Weijie Jiang
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Yvette (Qinyi) Liu
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	We have collected four billion online job posting records and completed skill extraction and standardization. Investigating how the adoption of generative AI reshapes labor demand across different skill dimensions, alters the skill premium, and consequently affects wage inequality and workforce reallocation dynamics. Examining the heterogeneous effects of specific cognitive, technical, and soft skills on job-specific performance, with a focus on identifying which skill portfolios yield the highest productivity returns in AI-augmented work environments.

Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Weijie Jiang (jiangweijie@nbu.edu.cn) and Yvette (Qinyi) Liu (Yvette.Liu@nottingham.edu.cn).
PhD topic	Geopolitical Relations and Corporate Overseas Interest Protection
NBU Supervisor	Prof. Yuanzhe Huang
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Associate Professor Steven Zhou
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	The global economy is pivoting from an efficiency-first model of globalization toward a security-first configuration defined by regionalization and fragmentation. With geopolitical conflicts becoming endemic, supply chains undergoing active de-risking, and great-power rivalry intensifying, the uncertainties confronting multinational enterprises' overseas assets and operations have escalated sharply. Chinese enterprises, in particular, are encountering not only traditional investment barriers but also novel non-market risks—including asset freezes, technology blockades, and selective enforcement—that go beyond conventional commercial hazards. Against this backdrop, investigating how geopolitical dynamics affect overseas interests—both through direct channels (bilateral friction between home and host countries) and indirect ones (strategic reallocation to third countries)—is an academic imperative. It pushes the intellectual frontier of the institution-based view in international business and fosters much-needed theoretical cross-fertilization between international political economy (IPE) and FDI theories. More critically, it addresses an urgent practical necessity: fortifying national mechanisms for overseas interest protection while aligning development imperatives with security priorities. This project is structured around several core questions. How can geopolitical risks be precisely measured, and how does the transmission intensity vary across different types of shocks? Under the direct channel, how does bilateral deterioration impair the operational performance and financing constraints of overseas assets through policy uncertainty and social sentiment? Under the indirect channel, does relocating investment to third countries represent a hedging move or an arbitrage opportunity, and how does such restructuring reshape global value chain configurations? Finally, how can governments and firms jointly build a dynamic protection framework that integrates early warning systems, diplomatic safeguards, and portfolio hedging? By systematically addressing these questions, this project aims to deliver both robust theoretical underpinnings and actionable policy instruments for protecting overseas interests amid geopolitical disruptions.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Associate Professor Steven Zhou (Steven.Zhou@nottingham.edu.cn) and Prof. Yuanzhe Huang (huangyuanzhe@nbu.edu.cn).
PhD topic	1. Managing AI Paradoxes in Manufacturing: An Affordance-Actualization Perspective 2. Generative AI Transforming Marketing Content and Creativity
NBU Supervisor	Professor Tao Chen
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Prof. Maria Jun Luo Prof. Martin J. Liu

Short introduction & description of the PhD project	1. AI is increasingly embedded in manufacturing, from quality control and predictive maintenance to scheduling and planning, yet scaling remains difficult because firms confront persistent paradoxes, such as increased system autonomy that still requires human escalation during breakdowns and efficiency-driven optimization that must be reconciled with responsibility and governance expectations. Affordance-actualization theory is especially useful for studying paradoxes because technologies commonly afford competing action possibilities. The same AI capability may simultaneously afford speed and opacity, standardization and decontextualization, or autonomy and escalation. As a result, organizations cannot fully enact all affordances at once; instead, they prioritize and sequence actualization in ways that reflect local constraints (e.g., skill availability, legacy systems, risk tolerance, union rules) and strategic objectives (e.g., rapid ROI versus long-term resilience). Therefore, this project aims to explore how manufacturing organizations manage AI paradoxes through the affordance actualization process. 2. The rapid proliferation of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) — including large language models (LLMs), multimodal content generators, and AI-driven creative assistants — is fundamentally reshaping the landscape of marketing content production and creative work. Unlike previous waves of marketing automation that primarily optimized media buying, personalization algorithms, or campaign analytics, GenAI directly penetrates the core of human creativity: the conception, generation, iteration, and evaluation of textual, visual, audiovisual, and experiential content. This technological disruption presents a paradox: while GenAI dramatically lowers the cost and increases the velocity of content production, it simultaneously raises profound questions about creative originality, brand authenticity, human-machine collaboration, intellectual property, and the very definition of "creativity" in marketing practice. For marketing scholars and practitioners alike, this moment constitutes both an existential challenge and a strategic inflection point. On one hand, GenAI enables unprecedented scalability of personalized content, real-time creative adaptation, and democratization of high-quality marketing capabilities for resource-constrained firms. On the other hand, it threatens to commoditize creative output, erode the distinctive voice of human brands, and introduce systemic risks of algorithmic homogenization, misinformation, and consumer distrust. The central tension of this PhD project lies in understanding: How can organizations harness the productive power of generative AI without sacrificing the unique, authentic, and emotionally resonant qualities that make marketing content truly effective?
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Tao Chen(chentao@nbu.edu.cn), Martin Liu(Martin.Liu@nottingham.edu.cn) and Maria Jun Luo (maria.luo@nottingham.edu.cn).
PhD topic	A Study on Financial Support for Green Innovation and Its Influencing Factors
NBU Supervisor	Prof Huihong Liu
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Dr Jenyu Chou
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	Developing new-quality productive forces is a core national development strategy of China. Characterized by innovation and green development, new-quality productive forces render green innovation a critical driver for national growth. Green innovation is capital-intensive and subject to high uncertainties, which calls for robust financial support. Accordingly, research on green innovation and its financial support has emerged as a prominent frontier academic issue. This project carries out systematic research along three dimensions: first, unpacking the formation and evolution mechanisms of green innovation; second, investigating financial-support pathways for green innovation; third, identifying key determinants of such financial support and exploring their underlying transmission mechanisms. This study

	intends to offer theoretical references for boosting green innovation and advancing new-quality productive forces.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Dr Jenyu Chou (Jen-yu.Chou@nottingham.edu.cn) and Prof Huihong Liu (liuhuihong@nbu.edu.cn).
PhD topic	AI-Enabled Platform Retail Ecosystems: Operations, Supply Chain Coordination and Governance
NBU Supervisor	Bisheng Du , Professor
UNNC Supervisor(s)	Zhen Tan , Associate Professor in Operations Management
Short introduction & description of the PhD project	Artificial intelligence is increasingly embedded across platform retailing, from product discovery and content generation to personalised pricing, demand forecasting, inventory allocation, fulfilment and after-sales service. These applications can improve matching and operational efficiency, while also reshaping information flows, incentives and responsibilities among platforms, merchants, content creators, logistics providers and consumers. This PhD project will investigate how AI changes operational decisions and coordination in platform retail ecosystems. It will focus on three linked questions: (i) how AI-enabled recommendation, content and pricing tools affect consumer and seller behaviour; (ii) how AI changes coordination mechanisms in pricing, inventory, information sharing, fulfilment and revenue allocation; and (iii) how platform rules such as algorithmic transparency, commission schemes and responsibility sharing can balance efficiency, participation incentives and consumer welfare. Depending on the candidate's background and data access, the project may combine game-theoretic and optimisation models with experiments, surveys, or platform/industry data. The aim is to develop rigorous management-science insights into when AI improves platform supply-chain performance, when it creates coordination failures, and how such failures can be mitigated.
Contact points	Informal inquiries may be addressed to Prof. Bisheng Du (dubisheng@nbu.edu.cn) and Prof Zhen Tan (zhen.tan@nottingham.edu.cn).

Other potential supervisors

UNNC		
Name	Research Area(s)	Contact
YU Jie	Business Administration	jie.yu@nottingham.edu.cn
YANG Fan	Applied Economics	frank.yang@nottingham.edu.cn
Chandra Ade Irawan	Management Science	chandra.irawan@nottingham.edu.cn
Li Lei	Business Administration	Lei.Li@nottingham.edu.cn
LIN Zhenjiang	Applied Economics	zhenjiang.lin@nottingham.edu.cn
CAO Yifei	Applied Economics	Yifei.cao@nottingham.edu.cn
CAI Zhao	Business Administration Management Science	zhao.cai@nottingham.edu.cn
Sunghan Ryu	Management Science	Sunghan.ryu@nottingham.edu.cn
MENG Nan	Management Science	Nan.Meng@nottingham.edu.cn
ZHOU Zhiquan	Management Science	George.Zhou@nottingham.edu.cn

CAO Cong	Business Administration	cong.cao@nottingham.edu.cn
NBU		
Name	Research Area(s)	Contact
CHEN Qi	Applied Economics	chenqi2@nbu.edu.cn
CONG Haibin	Applied Economics	conghaibin@nbu.edu.cn
FENG Zhaowei	Management Science	fengzhangwei@nbu.edu.cn
ZENG Shouzhen	Applied Economics Business Administration Management Science	zengshouzhen@nbu.edu.cn
YANG Lihua	Applied Economics	yanglihua@nbu.edu.cn