Sino-foreign joint venture universities: an introduction

Mike Gow

COLLABORATION in higher education between Chinese and foreign universities has been going on for over 30 years. The earliest collaboration, the Hopkins Nanjing Center, was established in 1986 and is still in operation today, offering postgraduate programs to both Chinese and non-Chinese graduate students. However, it wasn’t until 1995 that the PRC State Education Commission developed provisional regulations to encourage Sino-Foreign collaboration in higher education. Between 1995 and 2003, 34 joint education institutes (JII) were established, offering multiple degrees developed in collaboration with foreign universities and locally still restricted. Our Chinese losses were not merely teachers, but also our host families, counselors, and friends. Thus, we received an education that went beyond class lessons and textbooks. It involved insights into the daily lives of people and a society that was on the verge of experiencing dramatic social and economic transformations. After passing the national exams I enrolled in the MA program at Peking University. Suddenly I was taking courses with Chinese students and peers that required significantly advanced Chinese language skills. Despite the strenuous curricular demands, the three years at Beida were equally remarkable. I had a motherly advisor, participated in various scholarly seminars, and even made trips to Tiananmen Square during that 1989 student protests. Education at the two Chinese universities has uniquely shaped my academic career as well as personal life.

In addition to these JIIIs, single degree joint education programs (JEPs) were also permitted by the 1995 provisional regulations, with 438 being established between 1995 and 2003. In 2003, the Ministry of Education updated these regulations with a number of significant changes. Between 2003 and 2015, a further 33 JIIIs and 638 JEPs were established. However, the 2003 Regulations allowed for the establishment of a new breed of Sino-Foreign HE collaboration: the joint venture university (JV).

The JV differs from previous collaborations as it involves not partner universities, but parent universities who establish a brand new university with legal person status under Chinese law. It’s worth stating here that, unlike the majority of conventional joint ventures, JV universities are a form of cooperative JV where the foreign parent university’s contribution is measured in their intellectual property input, with financial investment being provided from the Chinese parent and, more often, the local government in the municipality or province where it is established. Currently there are 7 Jusz universities in operation (see chart below left).

While the regulations under which these universities have been established are the same, there are great differences between these universities due in large part to the educational philosophy and vision of the leadership involved in their establishment. Another major factor affecting establishment and ongoing operations relates to the Chinese parent university and the location in which the JV is established. For example, NYU Shanghai’s Chinese parent is East China Normal University (ECNU), which is itself located in Shanghai. ECNU is a key national university under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. All JYS, however, report to the provincial education bureau or municipal education commission in which they are established, even if their parent university is a national university reporting to the Ministry of Education. This is perhaps less of an issue for NYU Shanghai who are in the same municipality as ECNU, their Chinese parent university, and who necessarily have strong existing relationships with the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission and other government bodies in Shanghai. However, compare this with XJTLU or DkU, who are both located in Jiangsu Province but whose parent universities are from Xi’an (Shaanxi) and Wuhan (Hubei) respectively, and there is an added complication in developing relationships with all provincial education authorities; pricing bureaus who set the tuition fees, and other government bodies involved in the establishment and smooth operation of a Chinese university.

Sino-Foreign JVs are fascinating examples of transnational higher education, and also of the experimental boldness of China’s higher education reforms. They have been permitted in order for China’s reformers to examine new and different approaches that may be adopted to address challenges in China’s vast and complex domestic higher education sector, especially with regard to China’s desire to internationalize their own universities and attract both foreign academics and students.

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A philosophy from the trenches – University of Nottingham Ningbo

James Mirrione

PLATO ONCE REMARKED that the origins of education were in the activity of play. As a theatre and drama specialist I have endeavored to pay a little respect to that axiom. Throughout forty-five years of teaching, I have never known a student to praise me for following the syllabus. Instead, I treat the syllabus as a clock to run against. I design my courses to get students to any detour deemed more important than the pre-conceived path. I also force my students to stay with a difficult piece of literature, because the joy of discovery is what I believe lies at the core of true education.

I HAVE BEEN Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs at Duke Kunshan University for nearly two years now. Until our undergraduate degree program starts in Fall 2018, my main role is overseeing our Global Learning Semester (GLS). This program offers many challenges and opportunities for the advancement of higher learning in China and for providing an international and China-focused educational experience to both faculty and students from all over the world. The semester-long GLS program brings undergraduate students from over 20 partner universities in China, together with international students, in a liberal arts style program at DKE. In addition to our Duke faculty who come to Kunshan to teach, we have a small team of DKE faculty who teach language and writing courses. Most of our Chinese students choose our Academic Writing course, which involves intensive training in US-style academic writing.

The first challenge that I faced when starting as Associate Dean, was to ensure that the processes of selecting courses and faculty, approving syllabi, and orienting our faculty all go smoothly. All the courses and syllabi for our GLS program are vetted and approved by the whole faculty and are added to the Duke course catalog. Since our courses involve teaching many students for whom English is a foreign language, we have to ensure that the courses for our GLS program account for the different learning environment at DKE (opposed to Duke), while still maintaining the high quality of Duke courses, especially because our GLS program courses are awarded Duke credits.

In addition to running a Duke-quality program, taught mainly by Duke faculty in Kunshan, we also face the challenge of attracting students from Duke and other universities. Attracting more American students is challenging for several reasons: Duke students have to meet their major course requirements and other distribution requirements; and US students have the choice of many programs in China, some that are located in more well-known cities than Kunshan. Instituting a Kunshan Innovation Scholarship starting in spring 2017 has helped to attract more students from the USA, including students from liberal arts colleges that do not have China-based programs of their own. Word of mouth has also been helpful, since most of our American students have greatly enjoyed the experience of living and studying with a large Chinese student body in an international university setting with top-quality facilities and faculty. One of the great values of the GLS program for Chinese students is that it serves as a powerful springboard for students wishing to do graduate work abroad. Studying in an English language-Duke-quality liberal arts program greatly enhances their reading, writing, speaking and critical thinking skills, and they receive much assistance in applying to graduate schools abroad. Students from DKE have quickly become an integral part of the Duke community, as a great success in terms of providing a high-quality academic and extracurricular educational experience for all involved. Over 300 students have completed this program already, and we will run it for one more year before launching our 4-year degree program in fall 2018. Running this program has taught us a great deal as an institution, and this program’s success has at least partially vindicated the model of providing a liberal arts higher education to a largely Chinese yet also international student body. I am very proud of our work and pleased to have helped to bring this ambitious goal to fruition.

Andrew Field with his Shanghai History students and special guest Betty Barr Wang, who spoke about her experiences in a Japanese internment camp in Shanghai in the 1940s. Courtesy: Duke Kunshan University

A global supply chain of teaching and learning – Duke Kunshan University

Andrew Field

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A student’s experience of multi-cultural immersion

Xuehan (Shirley) Zhao

I COULD SPEAK YEARS telling you how much I appreciate my decision to come to NYU. But how about, “What” from my non-Chinese friend. “You break the law if you don’t support your parents? No way!” I could tell how surprised she was, and, to be honest, so was I. I didn’t know how to respond to her reaction because… you know… “why would you not take care of your parents?” We ended up having a vigorous discussion about parent-child relationships, exchanging experiences in our own countries and bringing in various texts we had read in class on moral philosophy. Such occasions happen to me often. They surprise, excite, and inspire me and make me reexamine my world from various angles. Being immersed in a multi-cultural environment also means being confronted with more serious differences. Sometimes my friends and I hold opposite opinions that can only be resolved by suspending the debate with “let’s go and get some food”; sometimes we joke about and mock one another’s living habits. Be it a casual chat or formal discussion, we don’t seek to convince others; instead, we acknowledge, understand and respect the unique positions and views that each of us holds.

I consider ‘multi-cultural immersion’ to be an essential part of a global education. For my education to be truly global, I’m not satisfied with knowing about, or touching upon, something non-Chinese. I want an immersion of variety, where I spend day and night with people of diverse backgrounds, worldviews and living styles. I’m eager to embrace the world, and am equipped with the ability and confidence to do so. Wherever on this globe I end up, I know I can and will thrive.

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Joanna Waley-Cohen

NYU SHANGHAI is a research university that includes a commitment to building on the foundation of global learnings and experiences education. It rests on the premise that, in the 21st century, active and substantive internationalization of learning is crucially important; that is a definition of education as education.

The city of Shanghai and the new business district of Pudong invited NYU to create the first Sino-US joint venture in higher education, in partnership with East China Normal University (ECNU), with a view to offering a possible model for the transformation of higher education in China. So NYU agreed to plant its third degree-granting campus (after New York and Abu Dhabi) in this rising global city, with the mission of using the intellectual resources of NYU with the multi-dimensional richness of China. From whole cloth it created a university with a highly international faculty; a university where research is peer-driven, not directed from the top down; where the curriculum is dynamically geared to our students' needs.

NYU Shanghai education operates on the premise that the world of higher education has changed in the past half century as the result of three major phenomena, namely: the revolution in information and communications technology; the 'new machine age' in which machines do many of the tasks formerly performed by humans; and globalization. A broad and deep liberal education of the old-fashioned kind remains important, but is no longer enough. Today young people require a new kind of educational commitment as education.

1) They need to become completely at home with the tools of the new information and communications technology. In this context an education in algorithmic thinking is absolutely necessary.

2) Their education needs to create the conditions in which creativity, humans' leading edge, can take place. A creativity that requires imagination and often is the outcome of connecting things that are seemingly quite disparate, hence the need for students to gain a broad range of experiences, and 3) they need to learn how to work effectively with people from different cultures in order to function optimally in our globalized world.

At NYU Shanghai half of the student body is Chinese and the other half comes from over sixty countries around the world. Non-native speakers of Chinese must learn Chinese to at least an intermediate level, and non-native speakers of English must learn to communicate effectively in spoken and written English, so that everyone graduates with bilingual capability. Students take a range of courses in social sciences, humanities, and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math), and have the opportunity to explore new interests, so that when the time comes they can choose majors that spark their passions. Every student spends at least one semester studying elsewhere in the world.

Beyond the classroom, in what may be the most educational experience of all, every Chinese student has a non-Chinese roommate and vice versa. Our first cohort of students will graduate in 2017; many have already found jobs in China and internationally. We have the opportunity to make a difference in education, in the workplace, and in life experiences more broadly.

The Global University model – NYU Shanghai

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