

Joint-Venture Campuses in China

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In the mid- to late 1990s, the Chinese government endorsed Sino-foreign education cooperation for modernizing and expanding the Chinese higher education system to better serve the developing market economy. The decree released by China's Ministry of Education in 2003 approved 721 jointly run educational institutions in China. Activities range from codeveloped new institutions to a foreign degree franchised to an existing Chinese university.

The Chinese government emphasizes that such foreign higher education institutions should provide foreign educational resources of excellent quality. However, with almost no program evaluations or strict accreditation measures, the quality of such programs has been placed under question. Most of the programs approved by the Beijing government are also accredited by the accreditation agencies in those universities' home countries—with, however, almost no ongoing oversight on the quality of these programs.

CURRENT ISSUES

Among the Chinese students who study at such joint-venture branch campuses, most possess strong financial resources but have only earned low scores from the Chinese National University Entrance Examination. Students who are not admitted into any Chinese university must look for other alternatives. Such joint ventures provide the perfect opportunity with relatively easy admissions standards. The only requirement is that students present a high school diploma and pay the tuition fee.

After being admitted, students who cannot provide proof of English-language proficiency are placed in intensive language-training programs for half a semester during (at most) one academic year. Expecting students with such limited training to read and comprehend the English-language textbooks on international business, human resources management, and other fields is unrealistic yet financially remunerative for these Sino-foreign joint ventures. These Western institutions, which fear causing Chinese students to lose face (and thus losing the tuition-based revenues), are allowing the students to graduate basically without English-language skills—let alone without substantive competency in their major fields.

These factors raise questions concerning the value of for-

eign diplomas from so-called prestigious Western universities. In addition, with some branch campuses now utilizing local teachers for the instruction of transferable college classes in Chinese, not all students need to learn English.

Concerning faculty members teaching at such institutions, the major issue involves the difficulty of finding qualified and experienced foreign instructors willing to come to China to teach, even for a semester. Such joint ventures provide rather low-end salaries, without adequate health coverage or opportunities for tenure. Foreigners coming to teach in China include mainly retired instructors coming for a paid holiday, inexperienced instructors seeking some practice before entering “real” academia, or people who cannot find a decent job elsewhere. While other legitimate reasons may exist for professors coming to China, most of those who stay for more than a year lack job prospects in their home countries or are retirees hoping to make China their home. And for some, it represents a more humanitarian commitment: bringing the best of the West to a developing country.

The quality of teaching on joint-venture campuses has become a serious concern. The foreign teachers described above have almost no training on cross-cultural communications skills, teaching experience, or in some cases any academic qualification whatsoever. The qualifications and skills ordered for teaching English in China are simplistic: be a native from an English-speaking country and look white (Western). If you meet these demands, long-closed doors in China are opened to you with all the psychological, social, cultural, and financial benefits. You can pretend to be your most

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favorite character, enjoy a great culture, and put some money aside for your student loans and car payments. However, truly qualified instructors find it rather discouraging when asked by the administration to make allowances when the students “cheat,” “sleep during class,” “miss the majority of their classes,” or “do not turn in homework.” That is to say, giving transferable college credit for inferior work has been a norm on these joint-venture campuses.

CONCLUSION

Of course, some institutions in China do seek to provide the highest-quality education they can—facing the challenge of low levels of English-language skills among Chinese students and the sociocultural, political, and financial pressures faced

when operating such ventures. Peking University, Nanjing University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Fudan University, and Tsinghua University (to name a few) have established several partnerships with foreign universities, mainly at the post-graduate level.

With the increasing number of Sino-foreign universities in China, institutions are pursuing rather aggressive marketing strategies to recruit students. Some administrators are lowering the admissions criteria. Instructors are cutting their expectations in classrooms. If on-site administrators and instructors fail, home campuses would blame them, mostly unaware of the sacrifices that are being made to operate such programs.

These joint ventures may not be successful and profitable in the long run. Some joint ventures are failing to provide quality instruction. It is not necessarily something they can correct, given the lack of English-language skills of students and political and sociocultural challenges. I highly recommend that such joint-venture campuses stop recruiting, graduate their current students, and leave China if they are concerned with the quality of the education being provided. ■

China's Tertiary Education Expansion

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In recent years, China's tertiary education sector has experienced considerable growth. In 2006 23.4 million students were enrolled in tertiary education in China (public and private, full time and part time), making it the world's largest system. Despite this rapid growth, China's tertiary education sector is no larger than in a range of other countries with a similar level of development. It is therefore possible that China's tertiary education sector will continue to expand for some years to come.

INCOME LEVELS AND POPULATION SIZE

In 2007 it was estimated that China had an average per capita GDP of \$5,300—making it a country with an average level of income higher than India (\$2,700) and Indonesia (\$3,700) but lower than South Africa (\$9,700), Thailand (\$7,900), and

Brazil (\$9,700). China's population has a median age (at 32.7) higher than that of many developing countries, although lower than most developed countries. In addition, although the proportion of China's GDP that is generated by the agricultural sector is similar in proportion to that of other developing countries (just over 10%), the proportion from the industrial sector is high and services sector correspondingly low.

The participation rate (enrollment ratio) of young people studying at the tertiary level rose from 6.4 percent in 1999 to 21.6 percent in 2006.

Expansion in the economy and incomes relates to increasing numbers of people who wish to study. The development of the economy also creates a greater demand for graduates. The shift of the population into the industrial sector involves a call for engineering and related skills. The growth of the services sector will probably further extend this demand for graduates and stimulate a change in the composition of tertiary education toward business, information technology, and related qualifications.

The rise in incomes in China and demand for experts means that the number of graduates is expanding at a more rapid rate than in most developing countries. This has raised some concerns about the quality and employability of graduates. A shortage of well-trained graduates could hinder the growth of the Chinese economy and prevent the country from developing more sophisticated industries. While China produces about 600,000 new engineers every year, nine times as many as the United States, the pool of 1.6 million young engineers in the country includes only about 160,000 with practical and language skills to work for a multinational corporation. Despite strong growth in the number of graduates, it will be hard for China to develop service-based industries. Compared to many countries, therefore, the Chinese tertiary education sector faces some difficulties associated with too rapid expansion.

PARTICIPATION RATES

The participation rate (enrollment ratio) of young people studying at the tertiary level rose from 6.4 percent in 1999 to 21.6 percent in 2006. In effect Chinese tertiary education was transformed in a very short time from an elite to a mass education sector. At the same time the enrollment ratio in secondary education grew at a slower but still steady rate, rising from approximately 62 percent in 1999 to 76 percent in 2006. This rate is still lower than the secondary education participation rate in developed countries such as the United States (95%), Japan (100%), and Hong Kong (85%) but fairly typical of developing countries and at a similar level to that of Malaysia (70%), Columbia (82%), and Thailand (78%).

The inference is that this rate will probably continue to rise