Chapter 2
A Case Study of Duke Kunshan University

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ABSTRACT

This chapter considers Duke University’s motivation, approach, and challenges in launching its international branch campus (IBC), Duke Kunshan University in Kunshan, China. Differing perspectives on the project are presented from the point of view of DKU students, faculty, administrators, and an international education consultant. Taken together and in the context of relevant literature and the information provided in Duke University’s primary China planning document, their thoughts and observations offer valuable insight to the ongoing conversation about the role of IBCs in higher education, and coalesce around the importance of an institutional brand rooted in consistent values and a genuine culture of faculty, staff, and student engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Like business, higher education is increasingly subject to the forces of globalization. Students expect opportunities to integrate global experiences into their education, and universities have not only expanded options for students to study or intern abroad, but some have gone so far as to create separate campuses in foreign countries in an effort to enhance international education opportunities. As Whitsed and Green (2014) have observed, the proliferation of international education initiatives has diluted the meaning of the term, so it is necessary to define what we mean by international education. In this case study, international education refers to “a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research and service mission of higher education” (Hudzik, 2011), and to expand the institution’s global brand.

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In the last decade, a growing number of prestigious private and public universities have created campuses in foreign countries. Although these new campuses are located in a wide variety of places, countries with booming economies like China or the United Arab Emirates have been the most frequently chosen hosts. For these universities, a global campus is not just a service to domestic students, but a tool to solidify its global brand, be more competitive in recruiting both international and domestic students, and find competitive advantages in research. However, this strategy is not without controversy, and current faculty and students at universities pursuing a global campus have raised concerns about how the decision impacts the institution’s identity, financial stability, reputation, academic integrity, and more. With these issues in mind, a careful look at how and why Duke University chose to establish a campus in Kunshan, China could be illuminating for other institutions that are seeking to find their role in a global education marketplace.

In 2014, Duke University (DU) officially opened an International Branch Campus (IBC) called Duke Kunshan University (DKU) in Kunshan, China. For the purposes of this paper, an IBC will be defined as described by Lane (2011): “an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; engages in at least some face-to-face teaching; and provides access to an entire academic program that leads to a credential awarded by the foreign education provider.” DKU offers master’s programs in physics, global health and management, while affording Duke University undergraduate students an opportunity to study abroad for a semester. The DKU IBC is a joint venture between DU, the municipality of Kunshan, and Wuhan University (WU) of Wuhan, China. Under this arrangement, Kunshan has given DU 200 acres of land, committed to covering over $200 million in building costs (Farrar, 2015), and will also share in DKU’s operational costs for the first ten years of the institution. Although WU does not have a financial stake in DKU, it will play a governance and educational role, largely to satisfy Chinese government conditions (Wilhelm, 2011).

PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to discuss the genesis and to explore the implications of the formation of an American and Chinese partnered university. As an emerging economy, China holds significant position in the global market, and continues to grow in prominence in relationships with traditional, Western economies like Europe and the U.S. Extensive research has illuminated this evolution of Chinese economic importance, but a preponderance of this research focuses on the quantitative analysis thereof. This includes the impact on trade relations, FDI, currency exchange, financial markets, industry-specific factor analyses, and so forth. For a summary of these relationships see Prasad (2009), Shlapentokh (2010), and Supadhiloke (2011). Qualitative research on Chinese-American relationships is limited and as noted by Lu and Gatua (2014) can be hindered by communication barriers, cultural practices, and the simple notion that Chinese respondents may not be comfortable or familiar with Western research techniques. In short, the east-meets-west phenomenon needs to be explored with a portfolio of techniques and research inquiries which includes both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This research project is timely in that it addresses this relationship from the human aspect with a qualitative case study methodology, addressing the inherent gap in the research.

This research project expands the body of knowledge inasmuch as it could lay the roadmap for other institutions of higher education to follow. The learning curve on a project like this is steep, as evidenced