

Internationalization of Higher Education and Its Market

– Taking International College as an Example

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Abstract

This paper is intended for looking into the inevitability of the internationalization of higher education with the prime causes of it resting in the facts that given such large-size Chinese population, the resources allocated to higher education in China remain insufficient to meet the demand for higher education and that universities in the UK, USA, Australia, and Canada enjoy comparatively “sufficient” or surplus resources on one hand and on the other many of them have sustained a cut in the revenue from the government of ten percent in real terms in the past five years and they will face a further ten percent cut by the end of the decade. Also lassoed in the focus in the paper are the subsequent reciprocity arising from the internationalization of higher education and the various forms of collaboration between the International College, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and its partners overseas.

Keywords: Internationalization of higher education, International college, Collaboration, Programs

1. Introduction

Over the recent years, China has experienced significant changes in the structure and delivery of its higher education policy as may be observable by its shifting emphasis from an education policy based on the ‘elite’ to a new one underpinned by ‘mass’ education. The year 1999 can be regarded as the watershed between the past and current educational policies with the formal expansion of student recruitment going on to meet the growing demand for higher skilled college graduates required by a burgeoning Chinese economy. However the resources allocated to higher education in China have remained insufficient to meet the demand for higher education given China’s large-size population and limited higher education resources. Indeed, the Chinese Ministry of Education noted that by 2008 about 124 million Chinese were of college age and according to a report in *China Daily*, one of the leading English language newspapers in the country, meeting this demand would have required 800 new universities and colleges at a cost of \$68 billion. The scale of investment and finance, the infrastructure and the human capital required to establish them are prohibitive. Consequently, foreign educational providers have been encouraged to enter this rapidly developing market.

Marijk C. van der Wende (2003, p.193) illustrated the phenomenon by stating “the fact that the growing and diversifying demand for higher education is not always being sufficiently met by national higher education systems creates market opportunities for foreign providers, which are actively explored by providers in mostly Western countries.” Thus it can be argued that the trend in internationalization of higher education has increasingly been encouraged and sustained by the economic activities of globalization itself. Indeed the growth in collaboration between Chinese universities and foreign universities has gone hand in hand with the expanding Chinese economy. Wendy W. Y. Chan (2004, p.32) noted that internationalization, to a certain extent, is response to the impacts of globalization and collaboration between educational providers is one of the most effective means to gain visibility, increase the market share and sustain the competitiveness.

There are many modes of collaboration one of which is the collaboration enacted out through International College. This paper is going to illustrate the phenomenon of the collaboration based on international college as the collaborators’ market in China by looking into the International College, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS).

The International College, GDUFS, a consolidation of one of the training centers for studying overseas authorized

by the Chinese Service Centre of Scholarly Exchange under the Ministry of Education, a training department of foreign languages for improving the foreign language proficiency of home scholars and a language proficiency test center, was founded in 2004 with the permission from the Department of Higher Education of the People's Government of Guangdong Province. Ever since its establishment, the International College has been attaching increasingly great importance to training students for studying overseas and collaborating with the partner universities abroad. It aims to cultivate the talent of those who are able to take part in international competition, using their expertise. Students who reach the entry requirements (passing the prerequisite modules and meeting a range of the IELTS requirements) can further their education in the cooperative universities overseas of their choice, receiving a bachelor's degree awarded by the partner universities.

2. Demand and Supply

As far as the demand is concerned, two elements, at least, should be taken into consideration. The insufficient resource base of higher education in China has already been mentioned, whilst universities in the UK, USA, Australia, and Canada enjoy comparatively "sufficient" resources. To attract more students from nations outside the European Union to British Universities, the UK government encouraged the universities to recruit more students. As early as Tony Blair's administration, the UK government launched a campaign of recruiting more overseas students. The universities in the USA, Canada and Australia have their own foreign student recruitment targets. As Margaret Kinnell (1987, p.7) pointed out, "universities had sustained a cut in revenue from government of ten percent in real terms in the past five years and they would face a further ten percent cut by the end of the decade. With the prospect of such bleak financial outlook they must therefore look to other sources of revenue."

There has been a great demand for higher education in China. On one hand, only 23 percent of the young people of college age have the chance to receive higher education. They encounter the inevitable effects of a relative resource shortage. To solve the problem in the near future seems to be impossible because of the large-size Chinese population and the strained financial capability of the government. On the other hand, the universities in China vary in many respects in terms of reputation, fame, social recognition, curriculum, ranking, etc. One third of the universities run four-year programs while the rest operate 2- or 3-year programs. The different attributes amongst the universities create a great difference of attraction upon which students base their University choice. When some of the students cannot go to the suitable universities that they define as 'good', they may turn to the universities outside China. But the high tuition fee is the main barrier preventing them from consuming all their university education abroad. For instance, it might cost a student nearly £30,000 as tuition fees and £20,000, covering accommodation, transport and other basic expenses, which amounts to 500,000 yuan in RMB's worth to finish the three-year bachelor study in University of Central Lancashire (http://www.uclan/information/international/fees_and_funding/fees.php) in UK, for example. By contrast, choosing to study in the international college, that is, spending two years in China first and finish the last year in a cooperative university overseas, can help them reduce the expenses by 70%. For example, students in the International College, GDUFS only need to spend per year RMB 45,000 yuan for the tuition fee and RMB 13,000 yuan for accommodation, food and travelling expenses. Therefore, the income constraint provides an opportunity for international education providers to run different programs, such as franchised or articulation programmes, develop branch campuses and so on.

Naturally, universities both in China and from abroad invest in various programs to tap the potential interest inherent in a large market. The international activities of many universities in China and of those from abroad have expanded dramatically in the past decades. Altbach & Knight (2007, p.209) classify the modes of the international activities as follows:

Cross-border supply - This mode may include distance education (e-learning) and franchising courses or degrees. It does not necessarily require the physical movement of the educational consumer or provider.

Consumption abroad - The consumer moves to the country of the provider. This mode includes traditional student mobility.

Commercial presence - The service provider establishes facilities in another country including branch campuses and joint ventures with local institutions.

Presence of natural persons - This mode includes persons such as professors and researchers, who temporarily travel to another country to provide educational services.

International colleges can thus be located in this context, their form usually possessing some of the following characteristics:

Split-site education - two years study at the home university, and one or two years' completion of study at the

partner university abroad

Localization of human capital - most of the lecturers are supplied by the home university thereby minimizing the cost base

Support from the partner university - the partner universities support the joint programs by sending staff to help teaching and assure and enhance the programs to ensure appropriate quality

Degree awarding - the successful completion of a student's study leads to the degree of the partner university

Thus the existence of international colleges in the education market ensures that many students' expectations in receiving a higher education of their choice are met.

3. Successful Factors

Mazzarol (1998, pp.163-175) of Curtin University of Technology, Australia, examined four characteristics of education: the nature of the education service act, the relationship with the customer, the level of customization and judgment in service delivery and the nature of demand relative to supply. He then went on to examine 17 critical success factors for international education marketing based on these four characteristics. The educational and management practice of the International College, GDUFS, may be grouped according to the key factors of Mazzarol's study:

3.1 Image and Resources

Mazzarol lists image and resources and coalition and forward integration as the two most important factors for success for an educational institution in international markets. An international college when cooperating with partners offshore selects partners with a different set of attributes in accordance with the requirements of the Chinese market.

When selecting partner universities, various factors including university image, educational resources, academic strengths and locations are taken into consideration by the International College, GDUFS, for example. The International College has established 24 undergraduate top-up programs with institutions in the UK, America, Australia, Canada, France and Korea. Taking the UK programs as an example, GDUFS has selected partners such as Lancaster University, University of Leicester, University of Essex, Coventry University, University of Gloucestershire, University of Central Lancashire and the University of Westminster. As a result, on one hand, students therefore are provided with various choices including very high ranking Universities such as Lancaster University which has always been very popular among the Chinese students in recent years. On the other hand, those students who are academically not very well qualified for entering a good Chinese university and who simply want to receive higher education at a 'modest' price are not too much concerned with the image of the overseas institution. Besides, those overseas universities obtain different educational resources and academic strengths, which can be reflected in the courses available. Various courses, such as Finance, Marketing, Management, etc. are provided for the students to choose.

3.2 Coalition and Forward Integration

According to Mazzarol (1988), many researchers have noticed the importance of possessing international strategic alliances or coalitions. Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, as one of the top three Chinese foreign studies universities, is proud of its international education communication and exchanges. It has set up educational links with 125 educational institutions in many countries and regions and the cooperation with the present partners is highly renowned.

The first phase of the educational service is a very important strategy in order to be able to recruit students. There are two decisions that have to be made concurrently, namely, the financial decision and secondly, the 'when' decision. Firstly, many families may not be able to afford the exceedingly high tuition fees if the child has to study offshore for three or four years for the bachelor's degree but they can strive to pay part of the tuition fee. The existence of international colleges can provide a partial solution to this financial problem. Secondly, parents have to decide when to send their children to study offshore and this may entail a decision as to their children's maturity. International colleges offer a period of transition in which their children can learn how to live independently of their families but within familiar confines of their home country.

3.3 Possession of Offshore Teaching Programs

Nicouland (1989, pp.55-65) notes that the inseparability of education production and consumption increases the need for international educational service exporters to integrate forward into the overseas marketing channel and to establish "foreign manufacturing facilities". Services such as education involve a high degree of "consumer/producer interaction" thereby creating a strong desire for direct control and presence by the producer

during the early phases of export development (Vanermerwe and Chadwick, 1989, pp.79-93).

If we take again, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, as an example, currently the university cooperates with many partners in the UK, the US and Australia, running 2+2, 2+1.5 or 2+1 programs all dependent upon the specific requirements of the partners and the applicants themselves. Students study at the International College for the first two years, conforming to the theory on the interaction between consumer and producer in the early phase of export development. This form of cooperation has turned out to be successful with partner universities reporting positive comments about the performance of the students. At the University of Queensland, for example, the average performance score of the domestic students was 5.0 in 2006 while the average performance score of the students sent by the International College, GDUFS, was 5.8, at a significantly higher level.

3.4 Ability to Offer a Broad Range of Courses/Programs

Mazzarol (1998) further suggests that the ability to offer a broad range of courses and programs is also a potential source of competitive advantage in international marketing.

This is the case with the International College, GDUFS, which can attract a broad range of students with many different needs. It is because the International College is based at GDUFS which is composed of 17 different Faculties and Schools such as the Faculty of English Language and Culture, the School of English for International Business, the School of Economics and International Trade, the School of Journalism, the School of Informatics that the International College can offer a broad range of programs with the full and active support of the faculties. Therefore the resource base of the International College, GDUFS, provides program diversity in courses such as Economics, International Business Management, International Marketing, International Finance, International Journalism, Computing Science, TESL, Media and Cultural Studies, etc.

3.5 Quality and Expertise of Staff

Bharadwaj et al. (1993, pp.19-40) highlight the importance of organizational learning and expertise as a source of competitive advantage.

As mentioned earlier, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies is one of the three top foreign studies universities in China, famous for its high level of teaching and high quality of staff. This has been exploited in the practice by the International College ever since its establishment and explains why on average 90% of the students can be successfully who are sent to our partner universities every year. Our teaching has been highly appreciated throughout South China.

Moreover, for every course (not including language courses) available at the International College, we apply the course accreditation process to it by inviting once two years the experts and professors from the partner universities to teach or oversee the classroom teaching conducted by the home teachers and by having officials from the Chinese Service Centre of Scholarly Exchange under the Ministry of Education come for inspection on a yearly basis. The top priority of the International College is always quality education and professionalism.

Lastly, in order to reflect the characteristics of internationalization, each year, the International College sends one or two teaching staff to those cooperative universities, covering the UK, America, Australia, etc. for short visits or pursuing degrees, which is good for teaching staff to absorb advanced knowledge and keep abreast of the latest developments in education.

3.6 Strict Administration over the Students

There are many other factors that contribute to the successful operation of the International College in recent years. A further feature worth mentioning here is the strict administration over the students.

For example, any use of mobile phones is strictly forbidden in class; any form of electronic games is forbidden in the college including student dormitories; attendance is a must with students disqualified from taking the final examination if they are absent for one third of the total class hours of the relevant courses; three failures in examinations in one semester will lead to students repeating the whole year or being expelled; cheating in one examination will also lead to the cheater repeating the whole year or being expelled. GDUFS has taken the view that only under strict administration will the students learn how to work in a conscientious manner.

All the above factors have contributed to the successful operation of the International College, GDUFS. From 2009 to 2011, 1, 816 students have successfully passed prerequisite modules in the International College, met IELTS requirements and continued to study their rest courses abroad.

4. Conclusion

With the deepening of economic globalization, the internationalization of China's higher education has developed

greatly. The establishment of the International College by Guangdong University of Foreign Studies is a very important means by which the university participates in educational globalization. The International College can not only send Chinese students abroad to make use of the relative surplus of educational resources of its partner universities for their higher education but also allows the college itself to send its teaching staffs to be trained abroad or jointly carry out research programs with academic experts in the partner universities and in this manner import the advanced administrative experience and educational resources from its partners. Furthermore, sending students abroad can also reduce the tension inherent in China's economic growth and the shortage of the domestic educational resources provided by the government. Meanwhile, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies also fulfills its social function of ensuring that more high school graduates receive higher education.

Globally, the world competition is chiefly that of competing for talents. The cultivation of human resources is becoming the nucleus of each country's development strategy with the role of education becoming more important than ever in accelerating a country's development. Designing the strategy for educational development in the 21st century has become a hot topic throughout the world. Thus the existence of international colleges is highly significant in order to develop and cultivate Chinese human resources and to improve the moral quality of the Chinese population.

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