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## American universities are setting up campuses on the mainland

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Lifestyle › Family & Education

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*US institutions are leading the charge in setting up campuses on the mainland for Chinese students who find their own rigid system doesn't prepare them for the real world, writes Christy Choi*

In the world of higher education, the American model is much sought after by Chinese students, who flock to the country in droves every year to study at its top universities. Now, US institutions are leading the charge in setting up campuses on the mainland, bringing a liberal touch to a traditionally rigid system.

"The more Chinese students hear about the US education system, the more they want to be a part of it," says Nini Suet, the CEO of Shang Consultancy, a business that helps Chinese students prepare and adjust to life abroad.

The system, she says, does not prepare students for life after university. "After the intensity of the **gaokao** [university entrance exams] people relax in university and don't do much. Many feel like the university years are wasted and come out not knowing what they want to do with their lives," she says.

**Nini suet, ceo of shang consultancy**

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So far, 26 non-Chinese institutions have set up branch campuses in on the mainland, according to data gathered by the Cross-Border Education Research Team (C-Bert) at the State University of New York at Albany. US institutions have the highest number of campuses, at 11, followed by Britain with four and Germany with three.

C-Bert defines a branch campus as an institution owned in part by a foreign education provider that takes part in face-to-face teaching and provides access to an entire academic programme that leads to a credential awarded by the foreign education provider.

"I've heard folks say certain forms of education are far too specialised. You don't have that

broad sensibility to move into another sphere of knowledge," says Laurie Patton, dean of Duke University's Trinity College of Arts and Sciences. "So you're 45 and realise you don't know anything about art, or engineering, or another field."

Patton and other university officials have so far visited more than 17 universities in China, as Duke prepares to take in its first group of graduate and undergraduate students in the autumn at Duke Kunshan University, a 81-hectare campus in a joint venture with Wuhan University.

It's an ambitious and risky project. While the Chinese Ministry of Education has approved plans for the university, which include clauses that explicitly endow the campus with the same academic freedoms as it enjoys back in its Durham, North Carolina, campus, there is always the risk that it won't hold up its end of the bargain.

"It is in China, so the university will have to comply with Chinese rules and standards," says Kevin Kinser, associate professor of educational administration and policy studies at the State University of New York.

"These will by definition create a different dynamic with institutional autonomy compared to its operation as a private university in the US."

Mary Brown Bullock, Duke Kunshan's executive vice-chancellor, says assurances have been "given at the highest levels", and that China wants the university to be there "for the long term". Other officials have said the university is ready to pull the plug on the multimillion-dollar investment, should things be otherwise.

Duke is projected to spend US\$42 million over the next seven years. The university did not divulge how much had been spent, but said the city of Kunshan had already invested US\$200 million building the campus, which is housed at Yangcheng Lake Science Park. The city would also take on half of the operating costs.

There is also the matter of whether an American university being transplanted into a foreign environment will succeed. US universities that have tried to open branch campuses abroad have failed in the past. Michigan State University's Dubai campus was an example of a programme that tried to grow too fast, says Kinser.

"It did quickly shut down its undergraduate programme when it realised it wouldn't have the projected enrolment to support the staff required to deliver an American degree abroad," he says.

And many of the programmes in place are smaller graduate programmes, not undergraduate liberal arts courses.

To mitigate this potential problem, Duke is taking what Patton calls an "ethnographic approach", which means building the curriculum based on what's learned in the next five

years. Instead of planning the full curriculum, it will have a soft launch by only taking on study abroad students from Duke, China and other universities across the globe.

"It's about leadership, not ownership - the ethos of allowing other people to thrive," says Patton.

While the trends in Asian higher education point to a willingness to adopt American practices - universities in India, South Korea, the mainland and others are looking to take on a similar four-year liberal learning based programme - Patton was quick to stress that models of good governance and philosophy are not solely an American invention. Similar examples exist in the traditional texts of Asia. She also hopes the university will be a hub for pan-Asian studies, by experts in the region, and that part of the mission of DKU is to explore these traditions as well.

Initially, the university will be offering classes on comparative literature, American dreams and movies, Chinese classics, engineering and ecology, and Chinese language at the undergraduate level. At graduate level, students can apply for master's degrees in medical physics, global health and management studies.

Duke will bring around 50 members of staff from Durham over the next two years and hire several Duke Kunshan University staff members. "We've had twice as many staff want to teach at Kunshan than there are places," says Patton.

But there is also the matter of cost. For US and international students, the cost of the master's programmes is comparable to studying in Durham at an estimated US\$72,165 a year for the master's in management programme and US\$61,174 for the medical physics and global health programmes.

The undergraduate semester abroad costs US\$31,048. Tuition fees for Chinese students are yet to be announced.

There's definitely a market," says Suet. "It's still a small percentage of people going abroad."

There are enough people in China's increasingly wealthy populace willing to shell out money to be affiliated with a Duke education, she says.

Duke Kunshan University at the undergraduate level does not provide a degree from Duke, but master's programmes at Kunshan are the equivalent of a Duke degree from the US.

Duke, one of the youngest universities to be ranked among the top 10 institutions in the US, has a track record of focussing on interdisciplinary learning and undergraduate research.

Programmes such as Duke Engage, which was launched in 2007, sponsors undergraduates who want to spend a summer of service with a US or international community in areas including outreach for health education or school mentoring programmes.

Last year, the university launched Bass Connections, a programme that combines the skills and knowledge gained from courses across multiple disciplines such as art, law, economics and health policy to tackle real world problems such as the effect of development on rivers in Peru.

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