

CHAPTER 5

The Global University in the Asian Century

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GLOBALIZATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION

In American higher education today, as indeed in American political discourse, there is a palpable and widespread reaction to globalization. A recent front-page story in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* proclaims the end of the global era for education (Chronicle, 2019). Noting a recent drop in the opening of international branch campuses, especially since the presidential election of 2016, it suggests that current political concerns will further depress the international extension and engagement of American higher education. Well before the election, however, there had been signs of a retrenchment. Rick Levin, President of Yale, struggled with significant faculty pushback against his plan for Yale NUS before he stepped down in 2013. John Sexton, President of NYU, encountered mounting faculty discontent in part because of his aggressive pursuit of a global agenda at about the same time. But, every year since, responses to globalization (both in the US and elsewhere) have only intensified, from nationalist and populist on the one side, to solely economic in relation to the spiraling accumulation of wealth by global elites at the expense of the vast majority of the population, on the other. Philip G. Altbach, founding director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, was quoted in the *Chronicle* article as saying that: “The landscape is changing. The era of internationalization might be over, or on life support.” (Johnson, 2019)

Meanwhile, the first international programs to disappear *en masse* in US universities faced with budget cuts were related to language instruction; in the

last five years, 650 language programs have been discontinued across higher education. This retrenchment has been taking place in a context where only 20% of the population of the US has any familiarity with a second language (compare to Europe, where two-thirds of the population knows more than one language), and levels of bilingual fluency are significantly below other areas of the world where English is not the first language. So although the US has never been very good at promoting the sustained acquisition of “foreign” languages (beyond immigrant groups that nevertheless tend to lose the knowledge of “heritage” languages within an average of three generations), it will doubtless see additional erosion of second language skills, justified in part by the assumption that, in an age of global English and Google Translate, resources for serious language instruction would best be moved elsewhere.

Before World War II, US universities had very little in the way of deep expertise about areas of the world outside Europe and North America. After World War II, however, as the US was thrust into a position of global military and political dominance, the US government allocated significant resources, alongside major investments from some of the most significant foundations (Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller in particular), to develop a global knowledge base, including in the first instance area studies programs in leading research universities. These programs and centres were designed both to sponsor serious global research in fields ranging from anthropology and history to developmental economics and political science, and to train graduate students in the languages and ways of regions and new nations — many newly established in the wake of European decolonization. The idea was that these students would go on to do much of this research but also teach in colleges across the country, and in this respect area studies were wildly successful. Government initiatives such as the Fulbright program used universities as circulatory nodes for increased global engagement with the goal of building cultural and political understanding, engagement and collaboration — explicitly positioning the United States as the destination of choice for college and university education.

The international recruitment of students and faculty has been a source of great talent creation, not just for the US but for the world; American colleges and universities have not only created more global goodwill but also more economic and social mobility than any other cultural institution or initiative. Millions of citizens from outside the US have been educated in these institutions. Many have stayed and a significant number have contributed massively to the innovation economy of the US, as for example in the Silicon Valley where fully a third of the successful start-ups in the technology world have been led by immigrants.

As universities recognized the extent to which their global recruitment, study abroad and exchange programs, and research relationships served their

larger institutional interests (and, often, finances as well), they increasingly sought to take advantage of global opportunities and to expand their “global footprint”. In the late 20th century and well into the 21st, US universities began to establish closer partnerships with universities elsewhere, setting up joint programs and sometimes even joint degrees. They also began to build “branch” campuses, sometimes free standing and other times in partnership with global universities with whom they had already established relationships (when it wasn’t a purely formal licensing requirement). Qatar’s Education City attracted Cornell to build a medical school and universities such as Carnegie Mellon, Northwestern and Georgetown to set up local campuses as well. The most successful branch campuses were arguably set up in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai by NYU, by Duke in Kunshan, China, and in Singapore by Yale in collaboration with the National University of Singapore. Other universities deliberately decided not to build full branch campuses but to set up global centres, allowing minimal investment and maximum flexibility, while also affording opportunities for students, faculty and alumni through the networks these regional centres established and cultivated, including perhaps most successfully Columbia, Chicago and Harvard (the Business School).

As I described in a paper presented at the Glion Colloquium in 2015 (Dirks & Gilman, 2015), I launched an effort some years ago at the University of California, Berkeley, to build what I called the Berkeley Global Campus. The idea was to use a large unused parcel of land belonging to the university on the San Francisco Bay to build a global campus with full participation from top world universities, including Cambridge, the National University of Singapore, and Tsinghua University. We drew up plans for joint research collaborations in areas ranging from global governance and ethics to precision medicine, artificial intelligence, data science, robotics, smart cities, new clean energy sources, climate science and entrepreneurship. The idea was driven by the recognized need to limit overseas investment and political risk, to protect against the possibility of allowing Berkeley’s academic and research mission to be compromised by local laws and censorship, and to direct the benefits of global collaboration and partnership to the host campus and the region of northern California, as befits the mission of a public land grant university. Unfortunately, well after the publication of the Glion volume, the plan came up against a continuing financial crisis that hit Berkeley, the preeminent American public university, especially hard. But it was also affected by a reaction to my plan to expand the global mandate of the university.

Clark Kerr, the first Chancellor of Berkeley, noted some 50 years ago that “the university is so many things to so many different people that it must, of necessity, be partially at war with itself.” This war continues to rage, as

many universities struggle to define what the 21st century “multiversity” (to use Clark Kerr’s famous nomenclature) needs to be, one that will be not just more networked and permeable, but also more global. While I understand and share the critiques of globalization that focus on growing inequality and massive disparities of wealth creation, not to mention the extent to which some university ventures to create branch campuses have run into major financial and political difficulty, I find the impulse to jettison efforts to enhance our global connections to be retrograde at best. All of our major challenges are now global challenges, and, whether we like it or not, the only meaningful solutions to the problems we face will be global in form and substance — and this includes the educational challenges ahead of us all. I believe that a genuinely global strategy for educational institutions is both inescapable, and a necessary component of any effort to reimagine the future, not just for colleges and universities but even for education at earlier levels as well.

CHINA AND AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

There are multiple reasons to embrace a global agenda, and not only because over the last several decades American (and British, as well as Australian) universities have become dependent on the billions of tuition dollars (US\$39 billion in 2017) coming from what until just a year ago was a steadily growing international population of students (in 2017-2018 there were over a million international students studying in the US). However, it is worth noting in this context — to focus now on China, which produces the largest number of international students in the US — that while the current “trade war” with China has been seen as predominantly about cars, soybeans, steel and technology, less evident but no less important is the critical role of education. In 2017-18, slightly more than 360,000 students from China were studying in the US, one third of the total number of international students (the next closest number is the 200,000 students from India). One third of students from China are undergraduates, close to a half are doing post-graduate work either for Master’s or PhDs, and one sixth are in K-12 schools, mostly secondary. Chinese students have favoured the US as a destination for college for some time, and there are reasons to worry this may be adversely affected by the present conflict. Meanwhile, the numbers of students from India has risen in recent years as the US has slowly displaced the UK as the destination of choice, while undergraduate options in India were challenged by the decline in many traditional institutions of higher education, but in the short term China plays the largest single role in international student numbers. And it is not just the tuition dollars that contribute to university life; many scientific labs in our major research universities would stop functioning without Chinese graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.

The financial contribution, however, is extremely important, especially at a time of stressed university budgets, particularly in public research universities. Given this background, it comes as little surprise that the schools of business and engineering at the University of Illinois started paying \$424,000 last year for an annual insurance policy against a possible decline of Chinese students to protect against losses up to \$60 million. Given the numbers of Chinese students at leading research universities, any significant drop in enrolment of these students could be devastating for precarious university budgets, whether public or private. And, although India is not currently targeted in the US in the same way as China, the rise of political concern about international students could spread beyond China at any point due to changing global economic or geo-political conditions.

Although the persistent rumour that the Trump administration was considering a ban on student visas for China was quickly quashed, such a ban was apparently under genuine consideration from some in the White House, and reflects a continuing concern about the possibility of espionage and property theft occasioned by the large number of students from China engaged in advanced graduate training and research in fields ranging from computer science and artificial intelligence to biotechnology. The FBI has lately been cancelling the visas of an increasing number of Chinese scholars, including social scientists with deep knowledge and appreciation for the US. And, more recently, government officials have been visiting research universities, warning them of potential dangers and suggesting increased monitoring of students from abroad. Should students ever become embargoed as part either of national security concerns or the trade war broadly conceived, it is highly unlikely that the Trump administration would provide additional subsidies to offset these losses, in the manner it is doing for farmers in the Midwest affected by soybean tariffs.

For decades, Chinese students have sought admission to US universities because these universities have been the gold standard for both education and research. Ever since there were global rankings, US universities have dominated the world stage, attracting not just students but world-class scholars and researchers from around the world. But the Chinese state has been investing heavily in its universities, and top Chinese universities have not only climbed in global rankings but successfully begun to recruit leading scientists back from US and UK universities. Last year for the first time, Tsinghua University in Beijing ranked number one among all Asian universities. Tsinghua took the top position from the National University of Singapore, that had led Asian universities for several years after toppling Tokyo University. But Tsinghua's rise has not happened only because of major state investment in faculty and facilities, but also, I would argue, because of a systematic strategy of global engagement (as both NUS and

Tokyo University had done before). I came to appreciate this objective as Tsinghua partnered with UC Berkeley in building the Tsinghua-Berkeley-Shenzhen Institute in 2015, while also establishing joint programs with other world-class universities such as the University of Washington and building the Schwarzman College to bring outstanding young college graduates to Beijing for a year of study.

When Chinese students travel to the US for their education, and when Chinese universities pursue global engagement, they do so because they are seeking the best opportunities for education and for research. They also follow a pattern that other countries have used at similar stages of their history. I have already rehearsed the modern history of global engagement for American universities, but it is important to recall that these same universities grew from small and largely provincial undergraduate colleges in the 19th century to become major world-class research universities in large part because of the influence of German universities, which many leading American educators and scholars attended in the late 19th century. Whatever the form of global influence or engagement, the most successful universities both in educational and research terms are those that have been open to new ideas and human capital coming from all over the world.

The dramatic increase in the quality of Chinese universities may by itself lead to a time when fewer students travel abroad from China for their education. When combined with the escalation of rhetoric around the trade war with China, however — especially the recent attribution of espionage and intellectual property theft associated with Chinese students and scholars on American campuses — this trend could become increasingly precipitous. But my real point here is that the US has more to fear than a slow diminution of tuition dollars coming from China. The value of these exchanges is far greater than monetary alone; first and foremost, the academic and research value has been and continues to be enormous, as universities recruit top talent from global pools of candidates. Additionally, the friendships and networks established during study abroad can last a lifetime, resulting in political alliances, business relationships and further research collaborations. The relationships established with universities on a global basis can also result in major philanthropic contributions to *alma mater*, which is another reason why university leaders from the US frequently spend so much time travelling in Asia. And it is clear that the Chinese scholars whose visas are being cancelled have contributed not just understanding but appreciation for the US, whether for its universities or for its society, culture, and (at least until recently) its political system.

Trade too has benefits that go well beyond the immediate economic returns of trade. Long ago Adam Smith, canonic champion of free trade, recognized that trade produced “sympathy” — by which he meant cultural recognition and understanding across distant populations. Whatever the truth

of that assertion, this in fact applies far more so to the world of education than to any other domain of human exchange. Given the tensions between the US and China at the current moment, the relationships that develop because of student and faculty interactions, and as a consequence of educational as well as research collaborations, are especially valuable. Leaving aside the dangerous possibility of increased conflict — whether economic, political, or military — almost all of our major challenges now are global challenges, requiring global solutions. There are multiple reasons that the current escalation of suspicion, and single-minded focus on the security risks of educational exchanges and collaborations, is short-sighted at best.

UNIVERSITIES AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES

It goes without saying that the more understanding we have in this world, the better off we will be. Educational exchanges, collaborations and networks increase international understanding as well as creating life-changing personal relationships and interests. But it is important to stress that this is true in the domains of research and public service as well as education. If, to take perhaps the most obvious examples, we are to begin to tackle climate change, or global public health challenges, or even global inequality and some of its most direct effects, we know we need to do so across national borders if we are to be effective, for no wall or barrier will keep a global pandemic or carbon dioxide or a rise in sea levels from being global migrants. And for all of these challenges, educational institutions can be primary ambassadors of global cultural understanding and cooperation.

We have stressed the advantages of global approaches for university budgets and advanced research, but it is important as well to acknowledge that the global circulation of students, faculty and ideas about teaching and will ultimately be necessary for our educational institutions themselves to adapt and to thrive in a global marketplace, even in the face of new funding challenges and increasing demands for accessibility and affordability. New ways of thinking about student achievement and learning, about the relationship of cognitive and behavioural development and the best strategies for teaching, about the ways in which certain kinds of applied or vocational skills need to be supplemented with softer skills in order to translate into a lifetime of meaningful employment and constructive societal contribution, about how to transmit creativity and imagination, about modes of assessment that can be adapted to localities but also translated in global contexts, about how better to align the methods and strategies of education at all levels, among many other things, will be more productive if engaged in ways that bring together global resources, ideas and institutions. In short, to find and adopt best practices requires being able to extend one's reach across the globe.

In addition, the growing insularity of campus culture in many regional contexts can only benefit from more rather than less global interaction. Students who have used their college years to cultivate local forms of identity politics are often unaware of the limited provenance of their own political concerns and debates. New forms of solidarity, along with renewed recognition of the wide range of cultural difference that exposure to the world introduces, can only expand the horizons of new generations of students. And while it was understandable in the past that concerns about issues ranging from academic freedom to freedom of speech and even critical thinking have typically been mobilized against interactions with universities in places such as Singapore and China, the sad truth is that all of these concerns are now universal and will only benefit from more global exchange to deal with the growing challenges of resurgent ethno-nationalism, political populism, the widespread return of authoritarian models of governance and the pervasive (and not unrelated) effects of social media on political life.

THE ASIAN CENTURY

There is, however, another reason why colleges and universities in the US (and other parts of the West) need to resist the call to national retreat, even when muted in the politically progressive tones of places like UC Berkeley which understandably has a primary obligation to state level constituents. And this is the fact that we are in the beginning phase of a transition from the American Century (christened as such by Henry Luce in an influential article in *Life* magazine in 1941) to what is now arguably the Asian Century. This is already reflected in the level and scale of resources being mobilized to support higher education, especially in China, but increasingly in other Asian countries and centres as well. It is also determined by major economic and demographic trends. The number of new cities in China with over 10 million people has for some time far eclipsed the number of old cities in the US with similar populations. But, in the next few decades, India's population will overtake China and, from all reports, its economy will continue to grow quickly as well, not least because of the burgeoning middle class. This demographic transition — when coupled with the rapid creation of new wealth and the high value placed on education — will have untold effects on the world of higher education.

At the same time, we are already seeing the development of an enrolment crisis in a growing number of liberal arts colleges in the US, especially in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic. While this crisis has been generated in part by a growing concern about the cost of higher education in the US, along with similar concerns about the economic returns of traditional liberal arts degrees, it is also about demographic shifts in the US to southern and western states. And it is likely that this crisis will expand to large research

universities as well if there is a real drop in the numbers of students from Asia coming to the US for study, for undergraduate as well as graduate education.

Even as the rise in educational and research quality in China and other parts of Asia is a necessary element in the actual realization of a new century that might be dubbed “Asian” for its dominant forces and influences, we also know that future trends will make Africa ever more important, in the first instance because of rapid population increases and the growth of middle class markets and lifestyles, but also for reasons having to do with the possibility that the kind of stagnation that places like Japan have experienced might spread across other parts of Asia, North America and Europe. That being said, climate change is likely to displace not only larger and larger populations but to create other disruptive geo-political trajectories as well that will have unpredictable consequences for the global balance of power.

THE GLOBAL MULTIVERSITY

Instead of responding to the current moment by retreating from educational globalization, therefore, I would propose that we imagine a different level of global engagement altogether. I have recently been involved in advising a new educational effort to build a global network of K-12 schools extending across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, the US, Africa and Latin America. As a result of this experience, I have been wondering if a new kind of global multiversity — a genuine network across regional/national boundaries and borders — might be possible. If, as in the school project I’ve been working on, one could in fact design a single university with multiple campuses in different countries, one could think quite differently about disciplines, academic structures, the nature of foundational knowledge and the relationship between the development of knowledge expertise and readiness for the world after college. One could engage in the fantasy of many a university president — the building of a new university from scratch. One would of course do so with constraints and guidelines predicated on the examples set by the world’s great universities, though one would also wish to draw from models that come from some of the most dynamic examples of universities that have significantly improved their standing because of their capacity to change dramatically under dynamic leadership (e. g. Arizona State University and Northeastern University in the US).

As we are about to enter the third decade of the 21st century, however, any new university should be less dependent on national models than on the recognition that successful universities for some time — and certainly in the future — must and will be global in that they must perforce appeal to a global set of constituencies, including multiple bodies, from governments and regulatory bodies to corporations and potential industrial as well as non-governmental partners.

There is also no doubt that any new university — and this of course simply reflects the demographic and economic realities alluded to above — will have to draw on a global population of students and faculty if it is to have the capacity to thrive in the coming century. It must have the capacity to draw on global resources to support the kind of research that will be necessary to maintain research relevance and excellence at a level and on a scale to compete with a growing number of excellent educational and research institutions across the world.

The purpose of this article is not to propose a design for a global multi-versity, but rather to suggest that any new models for higher education need, among other things, to ensure that the institutions we build for the 21st century and beyond take on the global in a more concerted, systematic, and even ambitious way that we have in the past. And, although the difficulties of changing and adapting well-established institutions are keenly appreciated by all of us attending the Glion Colloquium, the real point here is to suggest the importance of maintaining and expanding the global footprint and connectivity of all of the institutions we lead, wherever we might be located, and whatever level of reaction to the global dimensions of the fundamental mission of knowledge acquisition and dissemination might be directed towards the university.

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