

International students at Chinese joint venture universities

Factors influencing decisions to enrol

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The People's Republic of China has determined to assume a respected place amongst the world's foremost higher education providers. Its short term strategy is multi-pronged: attracting world-class scholars; attracting international students and encouraging Chinese universities to run branches overseas. As well, a small number of select foreign universities have been invited to contribute to joint venture higher education institutions in China. Joint ventures provide an opportunity for local students to obtain a foreign degree without leaving the country but increasingly they also provide a supported environment for international students to come to China to study. This phenomenon has created some problematic areas. For instance, all current and proposed joint ventures use English as their medium of instruction but the many of the source countries such as Russia, Indonesia, Japan Korea and Malaysia are not English speaking. Why then do international students from those countries choose to study at an English or American university located in China? This study explores the reasons why international students choose to enrol at University of Nottingham Ningbo China, the most established JV in China.

Introduction and context

Although international student mobility has been evident for millennia, over the last five decades analysis of trends and patterns have assumed a greater prominence in higher education research. In part this is due to economic factors and consequently much of the commentary and analysis has assumed a market-driven competitive perspective.

In terms of international student mobility, the situation in China has changed rapidly over the last five years. According to Zhao & Postiglione (2008), 162,695 overseas students enrolled in Chinese universities in 2006. Mainly from neighbouring countries such as South Korea, Japan, Vietnam and Indonesia, there were also a handful of overseas students from the USA and Europe. Since then the Chinese Government has been pro-active in chasing

overseas students and numbers of international students studying in China show a shift. The Ministry of Education's most recent figures state that in 2010 there were more than 265,000 international students studying at 620 mainland Chinese higher education institutions (Ministry of Education, 2011).

Although two-thirds of the students came from other Asian countries, individually the top provider countries were Republic of Korea, the United States, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Russia, Indonesia, India, Kazakhstan and Pakistan. France and Mongolia also provided more than 5,000 students each. However, the most relevant statistic is that 107,432 were studying for academic degrees, whilst 157,658 were pursuing non-degree education. In broad terms, this seems to indicate that two-fifths of the international students currently in China are there to

pursue serious study rather than simply to enjoy a 'China Experience'. This phenomenon is the subject of on-going research; especially in relation to the Chinese government's 'Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)' prediction that by 2020 the number will top the half million mark, with the majority of them studying for academic degrees (Ministry of Education, 2010).

What is interesting is that progressively fewer students are studying Chinese and more are studying in Chinese (Hou, 2011). Given that China is today one of the largest economies and more people speak a form of Chinese than any other language, why should Chinese universities be expected to teach their courses in English? If international students want to study engineering in China why should they expect to be able to do so in English? This issue needs to be considered in depth because not only it is an important aspect of how effectively international students can operate in a foreign country but also it may become a potentially problematic factor in China's internationalisation process. Regardless of the debate surrounding the issue, for the majority of international students choosing to study in China, the courses on offer are delivered in English.

Joint venture higher education institutions

In practical terms, the Chinese government sees joint venture higher education providers as a potential way to educate those of its nations' top students who are not able to attend top tier universities locally or abroad. Although each joint venture is the result of an idiosyncratic contract between the providers and overseen and endorsed by the Chinese government, there are some basic commonalities. Joint ventures in China are campuses of foreign universities that operate cooperatively with a local Higher Education provider and must be physically located on the mainland of China. They must not have profit as their objective; more than half of the members of the governing body of the institution must be Chinese citizens; and a resident Chinese citizen must hold the post of president. As such, joint ventures are Chinese institutions: 'Sino-foreign cooperative education may serve the promotion of the development and reform of education of our country, and strengthening international competitiveness of education of our country' (Ministry of Education, 2006). There is, however, another key defining characteristic in that the Ministry requires that the 'degree and diploma certificates shall be the same as those issued by the educational institution at its

own country, and acknowledged in its country', which positions joint ventures as foreign institutions (Ministry of Education, 2006). The Ministry resolves the dilemma by referring to 'Sino-foreign cooperative education projects adopting the educational model of 'double campus' (Ministry of Education, 2006). Essentially, joint ventures are a mechanism for well-performing international universities to provide an international experience to Chinese students within China. From the PRC perspective therefore, the most desirable are those that set up campuses in China with the aim of attracting international as well as local students. Two of these are already established: the University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC) and Xi'an Jiao Tong-Liverpool University. A third (East China Normal University - New York University) is preparing to accept students in 2013 and application has been made for a fourth (Duke University-Wuhan University), to be known as Duke Kunshan University. In 2012 Monash University and South East University created a joint post-graduate school in Suzhou. (For a detailed description of the function and structure of joint ventures in China, see Onsman, 2011).

Whereas joint ventures were primarily established to offer Chinese students the opportunity to attend a foreign university without leaving the country, they have also begun to attract international students to China. Although the vast majority of international students in China elect to study at the top universities, increasing numbers are choosing to enrol in joint ventures. One possible reason for this phenomenon is that the equivalent degree in the home country is far more expensive, even including the additional travel and living expenses.

International students into UNNC

UNNC is the longest established joint venture in China, operating since 2004. In terms of international student intake, it has ambitions to increase its number of international students from about seven per cent to about a quarter of its student population (Yu, 2011). If it hits its target intake of just under 7,000 students by 2014/15 and the proportion of international students stays much the same, that will mean a yearly cohort of up to about 1,500 foreign students. It has some way to go to achieve that. In 2011 there were 262 international students with 45 different nationalities enrolled at UNNC. Of these, 64 were from Britain, mainly from the University's Nottingham Campus. The largest groups of non-UK students were from Russia (35), Indonesia (27), Taiwan (16), Malaysia (14), and Hong Kong (10). In comparison with the national ranking of source countries, it is noticeable that

UNNC attracted no students from Japan, single students from Vietnam and from Pakistan and few from the USA. Conversely it attracted students from the UK and Malaysia, source countries that are not highly ranked nationally. The reluctance on the part of students from the USA and from Japan to enrol at UNNC is most likely explained by the fact that most of those students are enrolling in more highly ranked institutions such as Peking and Tsinghua. That UNNC attracts greater numbers from the UK and Malaysia is probably explained by the University having campuses in those countries. With some significant variations, UNNC generally followed the national trend in international students' source countries. The notable exceptions are Japan and Vietnam as negatively skewed source countries and Malaysia and the UK as positively skewed source countries.

There is one further qualification to be acknowledged. A total of 76 international students were enrolled in non-award courses. These students are drawn from two sources. The majority came via the University of Nottingham's other campuses. A total of 57 (including students originally from Chile, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Nigeria and Uganda) came from the university's UK campus and a further six came from its Malaysian campus. The others non-award students (19) are at UNNC for part of their course courtesy of their individual home universities, all of which have partnership or exchange arrangements with UNNC. Whereas it may be that these students were in China primarily for the cultural experience, it would conversely mean that the other 186 international students enrolled at UNNC were there primarily for the quality of the education or because the degree on offer is British.

In summary, the context at UNNC exemplifies the increasing number of international students who are choosing to study at Chinese universities for multiple reasons: as well as wanting a 'China' experience, students are also looking for a high quality education. Joint ventures offer a further reason. Whereas top tier Chinese universities such as Peking and Tsinghua attract international students because they offer internationally respected courses that lead to acknowledged internationally portable expertise, joint ventures that generally focus on delivering an international education within China for Chinese students are also starting to attract international students. While they as yet do not match the international status of China's top tier universities they do have a different advantage that will be explored further in this study: the currently operating joint ventures offer British degrees and the ones intending to start soon will offer American and Australian degrees.

Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to ascertain the why foreign students enrolled in UNNC courses: what factors weighed most heavily in their decision-making. From the literature scan, it seems that most likely it was a combination of three factors that may be summarised as: the desire for a 'China experience'; the quality of the course on offer; and the obtaining of a British degree. The hypothesis is that there will be a significant correlation between those international students who are doing part of their course (i.e. exchange students) and those who are there for a 'China experience' and a strong correlation between those who are enrolled in a whole course of study and those who came to UNNC because UNNC offers a British degree. The third hypothesis is that neither group's decision to enrol at UNNC was motivated primarily by the quality of the education on offer. The study steers deliberately clear of questioning students' satisfaction with the choice made: it is specifically focused on what factors had the greatest impact on their decision to enrol in a degree course at UNNC.

Literature scan

There has been a fairly slow increase in research into international universities operating branch campuses, particularly in developing countries. The increase in analytic attention paid to such issues has been limited to some extent by the lack of basic data. In some cases this has been attributed to the fact that the phenomenon of branch campuses is relatively recent and higher education institutions are reluctant to disseminate data that is as yet tentative. In other cases, studies have referred to unverified data, resulting in highly contestable claims and conclusions.

More than thirty years ago, Leslie and Brinkman (1987) showed that cost is a significant factor in students' decision-making about whether and where to enrol in higher education, although they acknowledged that this may be affected by the standing of the university. Marguerite Clarke (2007) also suggests that the institution's ranking plays a significant role in the decision-making processes of potential students.

Moogan *et al.* (1999) interpret their study of how secondary school leavers go about deciding whether and where to enrol in tertiary education as showing that their decision-making processes generally follow a series of logical steps, resulting in an informed conclusion. A later study by Moogan and Baron (2003) shows that students' decision-making is significantly affected by the quality of the information that is available to them and how it is made

available to them. Moreover, at least in the north of England, how, when and by whom information about higher education was made available depended on the gender of the student, with males being made aware of higher education possibilities earlier and more expectantly than females. Combined, the studies suggest that any logical structure underlying the decision-making process is dependent upon information being readily if not instantaneously available.

Salisbury *et al.* (2010) found a different gender-based discrepancy in their American study. They cite data that suggest that women outnumber men in studying abroad at a rate of 2:1. Their explanation is that originally studying abroad was seen as an 'experiential learning opportunity for undergraduates ... Majoring in foreign languages or the humanities' (Salisbury *et al.*, 2010; p.616). However, it should be noted that the gender ratio for international students studying at UNNC is 1.06:1.56 in favour of males, even though the campus offers mostly Arts and Humanities programmes, including a substantial number of language courses. In effect, UNNC's cohort supports neither Salisbury *et al.* (2010) nor Moogan and Baron (2003). Nonetheless the gender issue remains potentially relevant.

Much of the extant data on factors affecting international student decision-making about where to study was collated by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). Basically they separated 'push' factors (that is, reasons to leave the source country) from 'pull' factors (reasons to come to the host country). In essence they distinguished a two-part process: first, the decision to study abroad and second, the decision where to go. In the case of joint ventures, however, especially UNNC, which is for all intents and purposes a British university on Chinese soil, such a distinction may become blurred, as in effect Chinese students are studying abroad without having made the decision to 'leave home'. Conversely, British students at UNNC have made a decision to go abroad to study at a local university. Nonetheless, Mazzarol and Soutar's paper was amongst the first to propose that the decision to study abroad may be distinct from the decision where abroad to study.

Chen and Zimitat (2006) in their study of the motivators for Taiwanese decisions to study overseas came to two interesting conclusions. For students intending to study in Australia, it was the perceived quality of the education on offer. For students intending to study in the USA, it was the influence of family and friends. The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive or contradictory but rather an indication that Taiwanese students are not homogenous in their decision-making. Taiwan, Korea and Hong Kong are amongst the largest source countries for students moving to China for higher education.

Boycott (2009) reports on a study conducted amongst Chinese students who were considering studying abroad, and their parents, using the push-pull distinction developed by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002). Whereas the current study concerns non-Chinese students deciding to study in China, some interesting and potentially relevant data arose. Particularly, the study found that students rated (in order of importance, as the most important factors in their decision-making): on-site accommodation; range of programmes available; English speaking environment; language and academic support services; general facilities; international education experience; relatives or friends studying in the same area and social and emotional support services being available. Boycott also found that in contrast with most other studies, students did not rate as important specific knowledge of the institution they were applying to; its cost, quality or closeness to China; immigration prospects or future employment prospects. The factor that most strongly affected the choice of study abroad destination, especially amongst parents, was employment prospects on graduation. While some of those results may be explained by the fact that the study was done in Hong Kong, where parental concern for and influence in educational pathways is more overt (Wang, 2004), in general terms, most of Boycott's factors are evident throughout the literature.

Chen (2008) exemplifies the trend for studies in this sector to become more specific to individual contexts. The paper considers student decision-making in terms of marketing, with a particular focus on how 'twinning' has impacted on Chinese students travelling to Canada for their higher education. Chen proposes three overarching factors influencing why international students choose to go to Canada: the characteristics of Canada; the characteristics of the marketing; the influence of significant others. Further he proposes three factors that affect decision-making about a particular institution: its quality and reputation; the costs and profitability; and the influence of significant others. Chen notes some variation amongst respondents as to the significance of each of the factors, partially explained by demographic characteristics such as age and whether the students are post-graduates or undergraduates. Chen argues that strategic marketing has a significant effect on the decision-making processes.

Most of these studies consider Chinese students moving overseas to study. Onsmann (2011) considered the recruitment of international students to branch campuses, arguing that there are strong indicators that some of China's elite universities are on the rise as desirable places of study for international students. Moreover, the Chinese govern-

ment has indicated that, after a five year hiatus, it is eager to pursue joint venture higher education providers, which in turn suggests that the Chinese Government is intent on not only maintaining a high level of international students who are here to enjoy a 'China experience'; but also to capture an increased share of those students who are in China because of the quality of the education on offer.

Wilkins and Huisman (2011) consider both directions in their study of international student decision-making. They questioned 160 international students enrolled in a British university as to whether they had considered enrolling in a branch campus of any university in their home country and found that 64 per cent of undergraduate students, 72 per cent of taught postgraduate students and 100 per cent of research postgraduates would not consider enrolling in a branch campus. As the international students were

already there, such results may have been expected: the fact that a third of undergraduates would consider a branch campus in their home country is probably the most interesting datum. Wilkins & Huisman introduce five factors as influential in students' mental processes resulting in their decisions to study abroad: quality of the course;

convenience of the enrolment process; language skills development; value for money; and the attractiveness of the UK as a place to study and work.

The literature suggests that there are three potentially decisive considerations that emerge as broad factors that are likely to influence international students when they first make their decision to study at a joint venture in China. First, they are seeking a 'China Experience', particularly if their home institutions support it. Second, they enrol because they consider the quality of the courses on offer to be attractive. Third, they desire a British degree – even if they are not British students abroad. Most likely their decision-making processes will refer to all three factors to greater or lesser degree. These factors form the basis of the investigation.

The Study

Development of survey instrument

The development of the survey instrument was in the first instance guided by aim of the study and the literature scan, which indicated that a short and tightly focused

questionnaire is, in general, most likely to deliver useful data. In order to ensure content validity the study used a one-step deductive approach to item development, based on a thorough examination of extant literature on choice determinants amongst international students (Chen, 2008; Cubillo *et al.*, 2006; Maringe & Carter, 2007).

Second, a face validity exercise was done with a panel of expert colleagues drawn from UNNC's Centre of English Language Education, Centre for Sino-foreign Universities, the Provost's Office, International Student Office and the School of Education being asked to comment on a draft questionnaire, both in terms of item validity and fitness of purpose. Comments and feedback from a pilot study were incorporated in a revised version of the questionnaire.

The methodology – using the convenience sampling method of distributing a paper-based survey to be self-

completed by respondents – was prompted by the fact that all students live on campus (in a specially designated dormitory). However, it was considered that the distribution of the survey would be easier via email with a one-click link embedded. The questionnaire was emailed to 262 international students at the University of

...there are three potentially decisive considerations that... influence international students... to study at a joint venture in China... [T]hey are seeking a 'China Experience',... they consider the quality of the courses on offer to be attractive... [and] they desire a British degree...

Nottingham Ningbo China as an embedded hyperlink to a commercial survey package. Two reminder emails were sent; the first after one week, the second a week later. The return rate was 45 per cent, yielding 117 (n=117) usable responses that were automatically numerically coded for statistical identification and tracking purposes only. Individually therefore, respondents remained unidentifiable. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test measuring the adequacy of the sampling produced a value of 0.755, which, because the cut-off point is 0.60, indicates that the sample used (n=117) was adequate for the study. Further, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (p=0.000) indicates that the data were suitable for exploratory factor analysis.

Results and analysis

Steyerberg *et al.* (2000) found that where data sets are small, better output is obtained with a limited number of pre-specified predictors and that incorporation of external information for selection and estimation improved the stability and quality of the analysis. Hence, the first ten questions were descriptives that profiled the respondents according to demographic responses: age; gender; nation

of prior study; years of study at UNNC; course; level; and pre-knowledge of the campus. They revealed that 72.6 per cent of those sampled were undergraduates. This corresponds with the percentage of postgraduate students being 27 per cent. The gender divide was slightly skewed towards male at 57.7 per cent. Nearly half the student body was enrolled in Business and Economics courses (49.1 per cent). Engineering and Science claimed nearly 20 per cent of the enrolments and International Communications just over 16 per cent.

Nearly 85 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had few or no problems with English, even though only 24 per cent had done their secondary schooling in the UK or other English speaking countries compared with 15 per cent in Indonesia and 9 per cent in Russia. Nonetheless, the general profile of the total international student cohort enrolled at UNNC matches the national international student profile, given the exceptions already noted between UNNC and China in general.

Perhaps the most interesting statistics are those concerning the amount of due diligence by international students on UNNC whilst deciding where to pursue their studies. While 44.6 per cent indicated that they had done 'a lot', the same percentage indicated that they only done 'some', and more than 10 per cent indicated that they had done none at all. A further question asked how they heard about UNNC to which 34.5 per cent responded 'word of mouth'; 25.5 per cent answered that they had looked online; 23.6 per cent from an education agent and 10.9 per cent said they had heard about UNNC at an education fair.

The second section consisted of ten questions seeking to ascertain the relative importance afforded to the three target factors: to enjoy a 'China experience'; the quality of the courses on offer at UNNC and the attraction of a British degree.

By way of an explanatory comment, question 11 (I was attracted by having a 'China Experience', to enjoy the culture, learn the language, meet the people and to travel) was basically a yes/no response to the question of whether having a 'China experience' was considered important during their decision-making process. It was structured to allow respondents to qualify their yes response as important, very important or crucial. Slightly less than 10 per cent indicated that it was not important. Of the other 90 per cent, 19.8 per cent indicated that it was important, 36.6 per cent indicated that it was very important and 33.7 per cent indicated that it was crucial.

As might be expected, there is a strong correlation between this item and item 12, which asked whether the home campus offers an exchange programme

($r=0.566$ at 0.01). Just under 30 per cent of international students enrolled at UNNC are there on exchange programmes (57 from the UK; 19 from other partner universities). Correspondingly, 33.7 per cent of respondents indicated that home campus support was important, very important or crucial. A fourth option (not important) might have been confusing, as it could have been interpreted as either being available and not considered important or not being available. The latter was intended to be covered by the 'not applicable' option. However, overall, the results reflect the demographic reasonably accurately.

Of the respondents who indicated that they did not consider the cultural experience of living in China as important, 30 per cent were Russian (which may be explained by the well-established exchange of higher education students between the two countries); 15 per cent from Lesotho (all of whom were scholarship holders); 15 per cent from China (which is predictable) and the rest were individuals who came from Ghana, South Korea, the Netherlands and Mauritius respectively. In summary, even for those who came to UNNC primarily for the quality of the courses on offer or because they wanted to obtain a British degree, the attraction of China as an exotic location remained undiminished. Therefore, item 11 was considered a separate factor labelled Cultural Experience.

Beyond the appeal of spending time in China for cultural rather than academic reasons, the factors influencing the decision to enrol in UNNC courses clustered into two principal factors after an alpha factor analysis with Varimax rotation, chosen in order to maximise reliability, was used to estimate latent variables, with identified factors having an Eigenvalue >1 and factor loading >0.45 .

Three items, 13 (UNNC uses English as the medium of instruction), 16 (UNNC offers a British degree) and 18 (UNNC has an English campus), clustered significantly as a factor that may be explained by the desire of potential students to obtain a British degree. Bearing in mind China's determination that joint ventures must provide qualifications that are recognised in the home country of the partner institution, it seems inevitable for that factor to be a draw-card for students who are considering where to enrol for their tertiary studies, and indeed so it proved to be.

As well as the strong correlations between the three items, each item individually scored highly. UNNC using English as the medium of instruction scored a mean of 3.23 ($\sigma=0.94$); offering a British degree scored a mean of 2.91 ($\sigma=1.08$) and having an English campus scored a mean of 2.24 ($\sigma=1.08$). It seems that for international

students at UNNC, the desire for a China experience, though influential in their decision-making processes, is secondary to perceived importance of obtaining a British degree. The strength of the correlations as well as the high raw scores indicate that for the majority of international students, the idea of earning a degree from an English university is by far the most important consideration when they are deciding on where to study. This leads to the question of whether the perceived quality of the courses plays an equally important part in their decision-making: i.e. whether a British degree was seen intrinsically as a good degree.

The third potential factor arose from the clustering of the items that referred to Course Quality, a factor relating to the assumed quality of the courses on offer. These items were items 14, 15 and 17. However, although the correlation between the items is strong, each item scored relatively low. The quality of UNNC's resources had a mean of 2.04 ($\sigma=1.06$), with 44.1 per cent of respondents indicating that they knew nothing about it. The graduate destinations (a heavily used marketing statistic) had a mean of less than 2 ($\sigma=1.03$), with nearly half (49 per cent) of respondents indicating that they knew nothing about it. The quality of the courses on offer was considered somewhat more important, with a mean of 2.6 ($\sigma=0.90$), but even there, only 17.6 per cent of respondents considered it crucial. Further investigation may find out whether students see a British degree as inherently good; primarily as a means to migrate to Europe; or as a dependable pathway to further study at the University of Nottingham either in China or in the United Kingdom – or indeed a university elsewhere in Europe. In any case, the current study indicates that as a factor influencing international students in their decision-making process to enrol at UNNC, the quality of the courses on offer is ranked below the allure of obtaining a British degree.

Although students said they did consider the quality of the courses on offer whilst making their decision to enrol at UNNC, less than half of the respondents actually did any extensive due diligence about the courses before enrolling. Most either did no research (10.7 per cent) or only a bit (44.6 per cent), which suggest that the claim for it to be important in their thinking is at best theoretical and throws into doubt the significant correlation (0.427 at 0.01) between the responses to the due diligence question and the importance of the quality of the courses on offer: It also indicates that students who were concerned with the quality of the education on offer at UNNC during the course of their decision-making were more likely to do some due diligence by checking out the university.

However, the correlation between due diligence and graduate destinations was far less strong ($r=0.257$ at 0.005), which may be expected seeing that half the respondents indicated that they had no knowledge of UNNC's record when they enrolled.

As expected, exploratory factor analysis extracted three factors: English Degree (accounting for 29.06 per cent of variance) Course Quality (12.48 per cent) and Cultural Experience (11.50 per cent). Together they accounted for 52.9 per cent of variance. Cronbach's alpha coefficients (α) were consistently at 0.7, which is generally considered to indicate acceptable reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of the data shows a number of significant correlations that answer the research question. It is apparent that international students refer to three common factors in their decision-making processes when considering whether to enrol in UNNC courses. The most influential of these factors is the end product of a British degree. The second most influential consideration is the appeal of spending time in China for reasons separate or complementary to their academic ambitions. Third is the quality of the courses on offer at UNNC. The data suggests that this hierarchy is widespread among the international student cohort and that it is only slightly affected by either the course of study selected or the country where the student did their secondary schooling.

These results both support and contradict previous studies. Wilkins & Huisman (2011) for example found that international students in the United Kingdom ranked the quality of the education on offer as the most important criterion in their decision-making processes that lead to them studying overseas. This study tends to suggest the emphasis lies on the United Kingdom part rather than the quality part. However, their population was mainly Asian students (principally from China and India) whereas the current study has a population mainly drawn from English, Russian and Indonesian students. Further studies that consider the decision-making patterns of Chinese students who enrol at UNNC may move the results closer to those found in other studies.

Any study such as this must be very circumspect in suggesting that its conclusions are more widely applicable than in this particular instance. As well as bearing in mind that the data was generated by responses to a survey that were post hoc recollections after varying time periods, each joint venture institution has an individual and distinct agreement with the government of the province in

which it is located, and as such will have varying operational practices. The University of Nottingham Ningbo China has particular relationships with its home campus in the United Kingdom; with Zhejiang Wanli University, its partner institution; and with the Ningbo Education Board. Each places varying demands and expectations on UNNC, which in turn gives it a unique and distinct character.

UNNC places heavy emphasis in its marketing rhetoric on the claim that, in the words of its Provost and Chief Executive Officer, 'all our graduates find employment, start their own businesses or move on to postgraduate studies at top-ranking universities around the world. Our graduates are in demand among employers here in China and elsewhere because the University of Nottingham has an outstanding reputation as a provider of internationally excellent education' (UNNC, 2011, p. 2). While on the one hand such a statement can be taken as mere puffery, on the other some specific claims are made that could be subjected to closer scrutiny. For instance, the order in which the graduate destinations are listed is not indicative of relative weighting. More than 70 per cent of UNNC's graduates go on to further study – although the percentage of those who go on to study at 'top-ranking universities around the world' depends entirely on how one defines 'top-ranking'. Given that UNNC starts with a highly select intake, that statistic is hardly surprising. The percentage of graduates who go on to paid employment is a little over a quarter. Further, as the intake is generally from very wealthy families, those who go onto employment are more likely to do so because of family connections rather than a UNNC degree. The percentage of graduates who take an entrepreneurial route is very small, around one per cent. In any case, nearly two-thirds of international students enrolled at UNNC were not concerned or did not know about UNNC's graduate destination record when they enrolled. Whether local students are swayed by the rhetoric remains to be seen.

The University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom has genuine cause to claim that it offers 'internationally excellent education' because in 2008 it was named 'Entrepreneurial University of the Year' at the prestigious Times Higher Education Awards. It won because of the success of its entrepreneurial activities and 'the commitment to nurturing the most enterprising and globally minded graduates in British higher education'. Whether that applies to UNNC's graduates is subject for further research. Currently the numbers are small but nonetheless such statistics, spin and puffery are the basis for the mutually beneficial relationship with the Ningbo Education Board – a relationship that itself is an area for further research

and analysis. More importantly, a similar research exercise targeting local students who chose to enrol at UNNC is likely to further our understanding in this emerging area of international higher education. Finally, the most obvious area for further research is to ask all students on graduation whether their expectations have been met.

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