

The Internationalization of Shantou University

Shantou University's reforms began two years ago. This little known university situated in an out-of-the-way location was established about 20 years ago, and is finally beginning to see the fruits of its labors. Shantou University has distinguished itself as an emerging university with a unique character. Its reform experience could well inspire a re-evaluation of the concept of higher education and serve as a model for other mainland tertiary institutions. Shantou University leveraged on its tremendous international resources to achieve breakthroughs that other major universities have yet to explore to become a mainland university with the potential for greatness.

Since its inception in 1981, Shantou University has reaped the full benefits of the backing of Mr. Li Ka-shing, an international entrepreneur based in Hong Kong. In addition to his accrued donations of some HK\$2 billion, Mr. Li has also devoted his valuable time and energy to developing the university. Mr. Li's unwavering faith in the power of education can be illustrated by the following quote: "A life of wisdom is a life of reason. Blind ignorance is our only true enemy. That is why education is so important. It is not merely a degree or a certificate to a better life; it should provide us with the tools to navigate during our life. It is for this reason that education is the cornerstone of tradition and progress, of dignity and wisdom and our main tool to reshape our destiny. This is what education promises." A firm commitment to fulfilling the needs of society and its people is needed to build a university with an atmosphere of vitality and a passion for learning. To transform this university into a distinctive internationalized institution that commands recognition, one needs a deep understanding of the meaning of education and the wisdom and courage to carry out the necessary reforms.

Li often refers to Shantou University as his "third child". The Li Ka Shing Foundation received approval from the Ministry of Education and the Guangdong Province to position the university as an experiment for tertiary education reform, providing a platform for educators who are committed to furthering the progress.

Accordingly, Li set out the following goals:

Develop Shantou University into a distinctive internationalized institution that commands recognition.

Based in east Guangdong, the university would serve the entire Guangdong province with an eye toward the rest of mainland China and the world.

Formulate a student-centered policy to cultivate students who have aspiration, ambition, knowledge, perseverance, and achievement.

A book entitled *Academic Duty* sits on the desk of a senior Foundation manager who is involved in the reform process. The author, Donald Kennedy, served as President of Stanford University for 12 years. His participation on various

committees related to higher education makes Kennedy a leading expert on US universities and their operations. Kennedy wrote, "Universities are charged with the responsibility of passing on and renewing our culture. To complete this monumental task, a detailed plan is needed to encourage participation and to pass on knowledge from one generation to another. During the process of knowledge dissemination, the needs and interests of society must be taken into account." Kennedy believes that the secret to university reform is to put the interests of the students first.

Taking exception to empty slogans such as "World Class University", Shantou University does not covet undeserved recognition. Prior to implementing its present reform program, the university sent representatives to renowned universities all over the world to observe and to learn. They also talked extensively with mainland education experts to ensure that Shantou University's reforms complement the development of mainland's education system. Wei Yu, the former Vice Minister of the Ministry of Education, is a member of the Shantou University council. In an interview with Yazhou Zhoukan, Wei said, "University reforms need to be carefully planned and implemented by clear-headed people. Shantou University is taking quick but steady steps and it has not fallen victim to the latest trends. Their curriculum reforms and the move towards internationalization are worthwhile."

Shantou University is a general university with nine schools and colleges, namely the College of Science, the College of Liberal Arts, the College of Engineering, the Medical College, the Law School, the Business School, the College of Fine Art, the School of Continuing Education and the School of Journalism and Communication, offering one Ph.D. and 27 master's degrees. Shantou University has singled out three major academic areas in which to implement breakthrough reforms. They are the Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business, the Cheung Kong Institute of Art and Design, and the Cheung Kong School of Journalism and Communication. The Curriculum design for the Medical College was the first item to be tackled. The College has developed the nation's first "system-based integrated" cross-disciplinary curriculum, combining basic coursework with specializations to cultivate a new generation of academic and practising elites.

Kan Tai Keung, Dean of the Cheung Kong Institute of Art and Design, said that besides pursuing research and academic achievement, universities need to cultivate humanism and teach students a sense of duty toward their country and their society. This is why Shantou University has placed such an important emphasis on the humanities. Their hope is to foster a new generation of mainland professionals who will harbour a sense of social responsibility.

Professor Hang Jian, Deputy Dean of the Cheung Kong Institute of Art and Design, said as a result of strengthened laws protecting intellectual property, the creative industries have become one of the major pillars of the global economy. Traditional design education in China focused on techniques rather than on creativity. This limited professional development and the adoption of new technology, made it difficult to incorporate modern creative thought. The

reform of the School began with illustration design, which is widely applicable in everyday life and the teaching of which is not restricted by the Ministry of Education. There is potential to achieve breakthroughs within a short period. A course in illustration design was offered in 2003, to be followed by courses in architectural and interior design and graphic art design in 2004 and 2005. The school is taking reference from other renowned design schools in developing its curriculum, and has also invited overseas design education expert to develop its curricula. The School will also encourage students to take elective courses in other disciplines to expand their cultural and knowledge landscape.

The School of Journalism and Communication is headed by Chan Yuen Ying, the Director of the Journalism and Media Studies Centre at the University of Hong Kong. Chan has recruited a team of highly experienced media professionals to provide her students with a better grasp of journalistic field work as well as improved training in the practical use of English.

Chan also invites internationally renowned journalists to visit Shantou University to share their experiences with her students. In recent years, China's media industry has been growing at a rapid pace, and the country needs professionals who have an understanding of international issues as well as familiarity with Chinese people and culture.

For the business school to stand out among the plethora of such institutions on the mainland, it must develop its own unique characteristics and specialities. The Shantou University School of Business has chosen to develop Accounting for CFOs and Production Operation Management for COOs as its specialities. Professor Xiang Bing, Dean of the Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business, said the School, whose primary objective is to develop world-class Chinese business leaders, invites top international professors to teach and to share their expertise on a regular basis.

Four of the seven full-time professors in the College of Liberal Arts received their doctorate training abroad. Dean of the College Li Guicang, who has years of overseas teaching experience, was invited by Vice President Julia Hsiao to teach at Shantou University. Li has already made significant contributions to the reform of English instruction. Starting with the 2002 intake, pure language training has been replaced by specific content courses such as 20th Century Women Writers, Film and Novels, Simultaneous Interpretation, which are designed to enhance critical thinking skills and cultural literacy. In terms of the learning environment, all the fixed furniture within the classrooms were replaced by movable desks and chairs that can be re-arranged to better facilitate small group discussions. Class time is divided into lectures and discussions. This method of instruction creates an atmosphere of vibrancy and stimulates student participation. This new teaching method has led to an overall improvement in the students' qualifying examination results. These pedagogical reforms, according to Li, are based on his own concept of education, which is that education is the road, not the destination. The teacher is not a performer. Interaction between the teacher and his students represent a basic

respect for the students, allowing them to learn using their own initiative. Li said that by approaching English as an academic discipline rather than a language skill has improved the employment prospects for their students majoring in English. Up to 50% of the students move on to graduate studies, and last year, Shantou University's top English student was accepted for graduate studies by Chongshan University.

English language skills are not to be underestimated in this age of globalization. Having a global perspective means being able to absorb news and information from a variety of sources and to understand different viewpoints through effective communication. In May 2002, the Shantou University Council approved the appointment of UC Berkeley's Deputy Vice-Chancellor Julia Hsiao as Shantou University's Vice President to head the English Enhancement Program. The program aims to abolish traditional rote learning in preparation for national examinations in favor of a flexible learning style whereby the students participate actively to combine listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. In addition to national examinations, Shantou University has also adopted TOEFL as a test of English language. The newly established English Center is responsible for the coordination of all of the University's English programs and activities such as English Corner, English Festival, and English language publications. The university's professional programs have also incorporated English into the classroom environment. For instance, the medical college is experimenting with bilingual classes and classes that use English as the primary medium of instruction, and outstanding Law School students who have developed an excellent command of English have the opportunity to complete an internship in Hong Kong or overseas law firms.

The credit system that Shantou University has implemented is more flexible than that of other institutions, allowing students to complete their studies within three to eight years. Students can choose courses that best suit their academic development with the guidance of instructors. Wang Weilin, Director of Academic Affairs, is an expert on mainland tertiary education. He believes that a credit system creates a more flexible learning environment and offers more academic freedom for students.

Pedagogical reforms need to be complemented by a scientific, internationally recognized system to manage human resources, finance, and administration. Mainland tertiary institutions rarely publish their financial accounts on a yearly basis, but Shantou University has taken the initiative to publish its financial statements in its annual report. A finance committee was established under the University Council to strengthen the management of university finances. Human resources are traditionally the most difficult area to reform. It was necessary to eliminate the lifetime employment policy and establish the concept of performance bonuses as part of an employee's regular wages.

With the financial backing of the Li Ka Shing Foundation and the global connections of its managers, Shantou University has cultivated close relationships with internationally renowned scholars and academic institutions. A flexible human resources system has enabled Shantou University to recruit

some of the best professors in their respective fields. Each year, a number of eminent mainland and overseas scholars visit Shantou University to deliver lectures or to teach as a visiting professor. For example, Kan Tai Keung, Dean of the Cheung Kong Institute of Art and Design, is a famous graphic designer in Hong Kong and a member of AGI. Wang Shouzhi, Vice Dean of the Cheung Kong Institute of Art and Design, is a full-time faculty member at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California and is also a guest professor at a number of mainland institutions. The Law School has invited Ms. Anna Wu, former chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission in Hong Kong to serve as its advisor. The College of Liberal Arts has recruited the services of Professor Wang Furen as Dean.

Vice President Julia Hsiao has made it a habit to talk to students in the canteen. Li Guicang says he welcomes all students to visit him in his office. The only condition is that they converse in English. They have redefined the traditional Chinese view of teacher-superiority and have created a more equitable teacher-student relationship. These seemingly small but important steps have all contributed to a huge positive impact on the student's character development and attitude towards learning.