

Yale-NUS flak not mirrored in China

Foreign campuses there do not face as much criticism over freedom as Yale does in S'pore

By Ho Ai Li
CHINA CORRESPONDENT

BEIJING: The proposed liberal arts college to be set up jointly by Yale University and the National University of Singapore (NUS) has drawn much flak from the American side over a perceived lack of freedom in Singapore. But fewer potshots have been fired at foreign colleges with campuses in China.

New York University (NYU), for instance, is opening a campus in Shanghai next year with the East China Normal University, without sparking consternation – although China is no bastion of freedom.

Like the Yale-NUS college, NYU Shanghai will offer liberal arts courses as part of a broad-based undergraduate programme it plans to offer.

There has been some grumbling, but this did not reach “a crisis point” – unlike at Yale – said Professor Philip Altbach of Boston College.

Agreeing, NYU China studies scholar Rebecca Karl said there has been a lack of coordinated protest over its Shanghai plans.

Likewise, the branches of other foreign universities in China, like Britain's Nottingham University in Ningbo and the US' Johns Hopkins University in Nanjing, have not met as much criticism over issues of academic freedom.

While Yale is going ahead with its Singapore plans, its scholars passed a resolution to express “concern regarding the history of lack of respect for civil and political rights in the state of Singapore”.

“It is one of the few examples where we have seen a concerted effort by a group of faculty to use the formal academic governance procedures to protest the opening of a foreign outpost,” noted Dr Jason Lane, a global higher education expert at the State University of New York.

Clashes over values, like that in the case of the Yale-NUS liberal arts college, have arisen as more universities worldwide venture out to set up branches across the globe, in what some call the higher education gold rush.

There are now about 200 branch campuses in every continent except Antarctica, said Dr Lane.

The trend gathered speed from 2000 to 2005 and peaked in 2008 before dropping off due to the global financial crisis, he noted. But more schools are looking overseas again, he added.

Besides NYU, Duke University is working with a local university to set up a campus in Kunshan city, near Shanghai, that

DOUBLE STANDARDS?

Academics name several factors that could have resulted in the different reactions to the setting up of foreign campuses in Singapore and China

Yale-NUS	NYU Shanghai
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Politics: Capitalist Singapore assumed to be free and therefore held to high standard ■ History: Singapore considered part of “free world” ■ Pedigree: Yale is “aristocracy” and cares about preserving its brand ■ Precedent: Yale-NUS is its first foreign college abroad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Politics: Communist China cannot be expected to be free ■ History: Legacy of Cold War thinking, where communist China was always an enemy ■ Pedigree: NYU is “nouveau riche” ■ Precedent: NYU has a campus in Abu Dhabi

will offer courses in subjects like management.

While clashes over academic freedom grab headlines, financial feasibility is the key thing schools mull over in deciding whether to go abroad, said Prof Altbach, an expert in international education.

With China being the top source of international students, many foreign universities play down concerns about censorship to target its huge market.

So has Singapore been unfairly singled out? Is it a case of double standards?

Professor Karl said there was “no doubt a terrible double standard here”.

“It is in part about market size and promise of riches. But it is also, I suspect, about expectations: communist China cannot be expected to be free, whereas capitalist Singapore is presumed to be and thus must be held to a higher standard,” she said in an e-mail reply.

It may also be a legacy of Cold War thinking, where communist China was always an enemy but Singapore was part of

the “free world” and thus must be held to a standard to which the Republic itself never aspired, she added.

Professor Xiong Bingqi, vice-president of the 21st Century Education Research Centre, said the lack of protest could be because foreign universities have few illusions about academic freedom in China.

There is little real autonomy for their Chinese branches, which have to follow China's rules closely, he added.

For instance, they have to admit students based on college entrance exam or *gaokao* scores, without much room to set their own admission criteria.

Others say it is hard to generalise, as each school makes up its own mind. While Yale had strong concerns about academic freedom, other foreign universities in Singapore – for example, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas – did not have the same worries, said Dr Lane.

Yale and NYU also differ greatly. NYU is “nouveau riche”, while Yale is “aristocracy” and cares more about preserving its brand, said NYU's Prof Karl.

While the New York school already has a campus in Abu Dhabi, Yale's Singapore college will be its first abroad.

As Dr Lane points out, the environment of an overseas branch campus will almost never be the same as that at home.

He said: “Leaders need to decide what differences they are willing to accept and which ones they will fight against.”

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3 Singapore leaders to visit China

By Kor Kian Beng
CHINA CORRESPONDENT

BEIJING: Three Singapore leaders are visiting north-eastern and central China next week, each leading a business delegation to network with Chinese leaders and seek new business opportunities.

From Sunday, Health Minister Gan Kim Yong will lead a group of 65 firms to three cities in the north-eastern Liaoning province. This will be followed by a trip by Minister of State (Trade and Industry, National Development) Lee Yi Shyan, who will visit the proposed Sino-Singapore food zone in neighbouring Jilin province from next Thursday. Mr Teo Ser Luck, also Minister of State (Trade and Industry), will fly on the inaugural SilkAir flight to central Wuhan next Tuesday for a three-day visit.

The Ministry of National Development and IE Singapore gave details of the trips yesterday. The latter said Mr Gan's five-day visit will include meetings with key leaders like Liaoning governor Chen Zhonggao. The pair are co-chairmen of the Singapore-Liaoning Economic and Trade Council, set up in 2003 for economic exchanges and cooperation.

Liaoning party boss Wang Min, Shenyang Mayor Chen Haibo and Dalian party chief Tang Jun are among others Mr Gan will meet.

IE Singapore said the trip, organised jointly with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, is aimed at helping Singapore companies – from sectors such as transport, environmental and business services – to better understand the Liaoning Coastal Economic Belt and Shenyang Economic Region.

From Liaoning, the business delegation will travel to Jilin, where they will join Mr Lee. Apart from meetings with Jilin party secretary Sun Zhengcai, vice-governor Chen Weigen and Jilin city party boss Zhang Xiaopei, Mr Lee will visit the food zone, a joint venture between Singapore and China.

Comprising farms, food industries and a township, the food zone is seen as a channel for Singapore to diversify food sources and for China to boost international confidence in its food industry that has been rocked by scandals in recent years.

In Wuhan, Mr Teo will attend the Singapore-Wuhan Urban Development Forum next Wednesday, organised by IE Singapore and the Centre for Living Cities, to share Singapore's experience in city development and management.

Ng Eng Hen meets Cambodian ministers

PHNOM PENH: Dr Ng Eng Hen called on top Cambodian leaders yesterday, on his first official trip to Phnom Penh as Singapore's Minister for Defence.

During the introductory visit, Dr Ng met with his counterpart General Tea Banh, also Cambodia's deputy prime minister, with whom he discussed a wide range of defence and security issues.

Earlier in the day, the Singapore minister also visited Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.

In a joint statement released by Dr Ng and Gen Tea Banh after their meeting yesterday, the ministers underscored both countries' shared belief that the Asean Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the ADMM-Plus are key components of the regional security architecture.

The ADMM and ADMM-Plus, they noted, are important platforms for strategic dialogue among the defence ministers on common security issues.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, the ministers revealed that their discussion also covered islands in the South China Sea which several countries in the region, including China, have conflicting territorial claims over.

Dr Ng was quoted as saying by the Xinhua news agency that Cambodia and Singapore, non-claimants to the disputed waters, agree the conflicts must be settled through peaceful means.

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