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Chinese Executive Education in Perspective: CKGSB's Innovations in Business Education

Bing Xiang

Today, we find ourselves in an era of major transformations—including technological, economic, social, political and geopolitical disruptions—coupled with dysfunctional global governance, rising protectionism, nationalism and populism, as well as reconfiguring global investment and trading systems. Humanity has been confronted with serious challenges, such as income and wealth inequality, diminishing social mobility and climate change, which are difficult to address partly due to collective myopia. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic has only made these challenges more pertinent and urgent. In this era of tectonic changes, business schools have an unshakable responsibility in helping individuals and institutions (companies and NGOs) to better navigate through these turbulent times, and to make the world a better place both economically and socially.

Since our inception on November 21, 2002, Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business (CKGSB) has been innovating beyond the traditional boundaries of business education in order to play a catalyst role in addressing some of these societal and environmental challenges. Our mission is to cultivate transformative business leaders with a global vision, sense of social responsibility, innovative mindset and ability to lead with empathy and

B. Xiang (✉)

Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business, Beijing, China

e-mail: bxiang@ckgsb.edu.cn

compassion. In this connection, CKGSB has been and will continue to expand the traditional focal points of business schools, to help generate economic prosperity and social advancement. This chapter highlights some of our innovations in the past, areas for growth, along with planned initiatives for the coming decade.

“Top-of-the-Pyramid” Approach

A major innovation at CKGSB is our unique “top-of-the-pyramid” approach, which we have been spearheading since our school’s establishment, that addresses the learning needs of decision-makers (such as chairpersons and CEOs) of prominent companies and successful entrepreneurs. This new segment extends beyond the professional managers that most MBA and EMBA programs traditionally target. We believe that top business leaders need to be committed to lifelong learning to meet the challenges posed by today’s technological, economic, social, political and geopolitical changes. Our success in serving this group rests primarily with the new insights, skills and perspectives that we offer to help them stay ahead of the curve and better navigate through the world’s transformative changes. For this elite group of business leaders and entrepreneurs, their choice of program is fundamentally insights-driven, and much less shaped by rankings or accreditations.

CKGSB has succeeded in developing such insights on China business for several reasons. First, many of our professors tenured at the globally leading business schools, prior to joining CKGSB; and, thus, they offer cutting-edge management theories and practices from around the world and provide a global perspective in understanding China’s business and economics landscape. After joining CKGSB, they have continued producing original research, particularly on China issues—which is made possible thanks to the generous support we have received from the Li Ka Shing Foundation. Moreover, most of our faculty members are ethnically Chinese and, therefore, have an advantage in understanding the Chinese language and culture. At the same time, they have their fingers on the pulse of China’s economy and business environment. For example, three of them have taken up Chief Strategy Officer positions at Alibaba Group, Ant Financial and JD.com. This, combined with CKGSB’s students and alumni network that represents a Who’s Who of China business, gives our professors access to the leaders of China’s top private and state-owned enterprises, as well as multinational companies in China, allowing them to co-develop business knowledge.

To meet the learning needs of senior executives in China, CKGSB has developed structured, proprietary and fresh insights on China business and economics. Our unique insights and approach have enabled CKGSB to attract the decision-makers of China's most respected and innovative companies like Alibaba, ByteDance, CITIC, Fosun, Huawei, Midea, Sinopec and TCL. More than half of CKGSB's 16,000 alumni are at the CEO or Chairman level, and they collectively lead one-fifth of China's most valuable brands. The prominence of CKGSB's alumni network in business may be unparalleled in China.

To serve global business leaders, CKGSB offers practical knowledge on issues such as how to do business in and with China, and how to compete and collaborate in China, one of the world's most dynamic markets. In light of China's growing importance in the global economy, we provide an in-depth and up-to-date look into the potential global implications of China's transformation, as well as innovations stemming from Chinese companies like DJI and ByteDance (TikTok) with potential global applicability and impact. To date, CKGSB has trained more than 3,000 senior global executives and successfully delivered custom-designed programs to the senior management teams of multinational companies like Agilent Technologies, Clifford Chance, Cummins and Lego Education.

A Global Ecosystem Fueling Economic Disruptions

CKGSB's experiments in fostering a new generation of economic disruptions represent another innovative focus. The idea of economic disruption is central to economic development and social harmony, as it is indispensable in generating upward social mobility among young people. China is noted for its substantive and continued economic disruptions as evidenced by newly emerged large-scale companies and newly minted billionaires in the past two decades. For example, mainland China today has 117 companies on the Fortune 500 list (in 2020), while in 2000 it only had nine. Moreover, when you look at the company level or at the wealthiest individuals in China, there are always newcomers, and the lists of the wealthiest individuals and largest corporations in China are always changing. According to the 2020 Hurun China Rich List, China added 257 new billionaires (in USD), as of August 2020, despite the pandemic, achieving an over 300% increase in the total number of billionaires (in USD) in a span of ten years. Meanwhile, the number of Fortune 500 companies in Mainland China and Hong

Kong also increased from 12 in 2001 to 124 in 2020. While China may not have been as strong in innovation as the United States, it may have been the best in generating economic disruptions in the past 20 years. Japan is noted for its excellence in innovation, yet it has not performed well in generating economic disruptions. Five out of the 641 unicorn companies globally are from Japan (as of April 2021).

To foster these types of disruptions in China, since 2015, CKGSB has been working with key players such as Tencent, Baidu, JD.com, Microsoft, Softbank, Bytedance, Alibaba and others, to set up an ecosystem in China that focuses on developing unicorn and soon-to-be-unicorn companies. With an emphasis on social innovation, we hope to develop a new generation of business leaders who are not only successful, but also socially-minded, long-term oriented and who have a global perspective.

Building on our success in China, we have extended this initiative to European and ASEAN markets (in partnership with Churchill College, Cambridge University), and are in the process of expanding it to other markets like Japan, Korea, and countries in Latin America and Africa. China's experience in generating economic disruptions and our school's experiments in this regard may be of global relevance. In light of the current COVID-19 outbreak, our initiative to build a global ecosystem, which cultivates economic prosperity while emphasizing social innovation and responsibility, may be more pertinent and urgent than ever before.

The Humanities in Business Education

CKGSB also systematically incorporated the humanities—such as history, religion and philosophy—into our business curricula starting from 2005. Our introduction of the humanities has been motivated by the following considerations. Firstly, on the individual level, we hope to inspire business leaders to aspire to not just a “rich” life, but also an “enriched” and even “enlightened” life. Secondly, we believe that the humanities—particularly courses engaging global history, religion and different philosophical traditions—are essential for the business leaders of today and tomorrow to manage global and diverse teams. Lastly, the humanities can help mitigate humanity's collective myopia, and foster a long-term vision and a broader view of business for the greater and global good.

Social Responsibility and Social Innovation

CKGSB's experiments in social responsibility focus on the whole wealth cycle—not only on how we do business, but also why we do business, and how we apply the wealth generated.

Since 2010, CKGSB has been requiring its EMBA students to complete 48 hours of community and philanthropy work (equivalent to 6 days of course work), in order to graduate. This initial experiment with our EMBA students was later extended to other degree programs at CKGSB in 2012.

In 2017, we started offering a compulsory social innovation module. Key issues humanity faces today—such as income and wealth inequality, diminishing social mobility and sustainability—cannot be solely addressed by the business, government or non-profit sector alone, but rather require collaboration among all parties to effectively address them. This is the reason we promote collaboration across government, businesses, NGOs, civil society and international organizations by experimenting with social innovation.

CKGSB's Challenges and Areas for Growth

With efforts of nearly two decades, CKGSB has become the preferred choice among business leaders of prominent companies and a new generation of economic disruptors in China, as well as among world-class scholars returning to China. CKGSB's brand has also been well recognized in ASEAN countries, Japan and Korea. However, our brand awareness is limited in other regions and markets, as we are a relatively young school and only started to expand into overseas markets in 2011 by establishing representative offices in New York and London. We also recognize the need to diversify our faculty to become more global, since most of our professors are Chinese by heritage. The ongoing decoupling between China and the United States is another challenge we face in our globalization efforts.

CKGSB does not enjoy the scale and size of endowments like some of the world's top schools. Moreover, given that the Chinese government has in recent years increased its financial support for state-controlled business schools and is expected to continue doing so in the future, the competitiveness of private business schools, like CKGSB, within China will be impacted. In addition, CKGSB also faces increasing challenges from new players, like Hundun and Dark Horse University, in the Chinese ecosystem of

management education. In light of these, CKGSB has been relentlessly innovating, which is essential for us to thrive in China's fast changing business environment.

Going forward, we seek to work with schools, businesses, governments, civil society and multilateral institutions worldwide to continue pushing the boundaries of business education and play a constructive role in addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing the global community. Particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its ramifications, it has become more urgent and imperative for business schools to play a catalyst role in advancing cooperation among the different stakeholders. More than ever, we need globally minded and socially responsible business leaders, who can compete with compassion and empathy. We, at CKGSB, will continue to stay positive, future-oriented and innovative in driving that agenda forward.