

Thoughts on the international cooperation and exchanges of Chinese research universities

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Abstract: More prominent in the 21st century than ever are the internationalization of the competition for talents, the globalization of their mobility, and the diversity of the demand for them. This article analyzes the major features and content of the international cooperation and exchanges, and further discusses their tactics and measures in the process of internationalization of Chinese research universities, based on the latter's really situations.

Key words: research university; international cooperation and exchanges

Since the 21st century, the pursuit of peace, development and cooperation has become the dominant trend of the time. The unstoppable polarization of the world, the deepening globalization of the economy, the rapid development of the science and technology, the prosperity of the knowledge economy, and the burgeoning global competition lead to the internationalization of the demand for talents and the globalization of their mobility. Under this context, institutions of higher education are required to educate top elites with international vision, awareness, and communication capability. Meanwhile, the fast evolution of the information technology removes the geographical barriers among people and thus significantly accelerates the internationalization of universities. The latter roots from the fact that higher education must be adapted to the history of the world and to the globalization of the politics, economy and technology. It is also the natural result of its own development. In reverse, the process contributes greatly to the evolution of the society. At present the major step to foster the internationalization of universities is to embark on the international cooperation and exchanges.

This article analyzes in brief the main features and contents of the international cooperation and exchanges of research universities both in the developed countries and in China, with the focus on the latter's tactics and measures of international activities in the process of internationalization.

1. Strategies of the international cooperation and exchanges of research universities across the world

All research universities across the world attach great importance to the international cooperation and exchanges without exception. Many of them regard the level of internationalization as an important assessment of the quality of education. Those universities have world-class management ideas and methods, high-level scholars and academic achievements, and active and harmonious scholarly atmosphere. They possess considerable international influence, strong comprehensive strength and high core competence. The international cooperation and exchanges account for high percentage of their daily education and research activities. Their administrators, faculty and students are highly capable of international engagement. Their goal is to become a global university.

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Taking Yale University of the United States for example, the historic mission of the university is to educate leaders in an increasingly interconnected world. To achieve the goal, it endeavors to (1) develop sufficient curriculum in global and regional affairs so that students can equip themselves with the knowledge required of global citizens and leaders; (2) provide undergraduates, as well as graduate and professional students, opportunities to work or study abroad to broaden their appreciation of cultural differences as well as the globalizing forces at work today; and (3) open its doors to a sufficient representation of international students and scholars, both to have a direct stake in educating the leaders of other nations and to give U.S. students the opportunity to develop personal ties across a range of national cultures.

Taking Tokyo Institute of Technology in Japan for another example, it sets forth the goal “toward the creation of university of science and technology to lead the world” and takes the following measures to achieve it: (1) improving the communication of the faculty and students in English, developing bilingual curricula gradually, open foreign-oriented courses; opening courses to educate international talents and equip them with knowledge of study and living abroad; encouraging students to go abroad for exchange or education, increasing the admissions of international students; (2) opening the campus to scholars from different countries and inviting them to participate in academic management; employing the faculty from foreign universities to be guest or adjunct faculty; (3) increasing international exchanges and endeavor to sign more cooperative agreements with world renowned universities; (4) strengthening domestic and international publicity to improve the awareness of international exchanges of the faculty and students, as well as the influence of the university in the world; and (5) fostering the internal management and services for the international cooperation and exchanges.

Chinese research universities also place a value on the international cooperation and exchanges in the course of development. Since China opened up in the late 1970s, especially after the entrance to the WTO, those universities develop at an unprecedented speed, and burgeon with international cooperation and exchanges and comprehensive strength and international influence. They are predominant in China and enjoy certain positive reputation in the world. However, despite the various international cooperation and exchanges, they are still relatively new in the engagement, short of faculties and students with international capability, deficient in world-class scholars, and low in the percentage of the international faculty and students among the overall faculty and students, lacking in international visibility and influence. In a nutshell, they are far behind the internationalization of the first-rate universities in the world, and positioning disadvantageously in the international cooperation and exchanges.

2. Main means of the international cooperation and exchanges of Chinese research universities

The main means for Chinese research universities to carry out international cooperation and exchanges are “going out” and “bringing in” tactics, whose purpose is to introduce high-quality foreign educational resources for assimilation, absorption and recreation, and then to learn, to improve and to innovate.

The so-called “going out” is to send students overseas for various international activities of cooperation and exchanges after careful screening procedures. The tactic is an important step to carry out international cooperation and exchanges, and the showcase of confidence as well. By “going out”, Chinese universities can proactively assimilate themselves into the mainstream of the international community and avoid being marginalized. “Going out” can have different forms: (1) participating in conventions, academic conferences, visits, lecturing, joint

research, assuming positions in international organizations; (2) sending students abroad for exchange programs; (3) encouraging faculty and students to publish papers in international journals; and (4) establishing various education facilities abroad etc.

The “bringing in” tactic is to invite international institutions of higher education, as well as academic organizations, to China for different cooperative and exchange activities. The purpose is to introduce them to Chinese institutions of higher education and offer them opportunities to understand China, which is an important channel to promote Chinese culture. The basic ways of “bringing in” may include: (1) inviting excellent academic teams and scholars from abroad to visit the universities; (2) admitting and educating international students; (3) opening teaching positions to international scholars; (4) inviting foreign experts to teach and research; (4) purchasing cutting-edge equipments from abroad; (5) introducing international intelligence to create new disciplines and subjects; and (6) adopting international high-quality curricula, textbooks, teaching facilities and teaching methods.

“Going out” and “bringing in” should be implemented inseparably. Both tactics are targeted to achieve the general guideline that “education should be oriented towards modernization drive, the world and the future”. By opening up and introducing high-quality foreign educational resources, Chinese universities make use of the advanced educational ideas, and hence improve their comprehensive strength, international competitiveness and visibility.

3. Goals and forms of the international cooperation and exchanges of research universities

3.1 Goals of the international cooperation and exchanges of research universities

The international cooperation and exchanges, as one of the strategic objectives of the university’s overall development, must service the internationalization and all-round development of the faculty and students. Their approaches, tenets and measures should observe the principles of scientific development, human-centric, making overall plans and taking all factors into consideration for a comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development. Each university must ascertain its objectives of international cooperation and exchanges on the basis of the stage of their own development. The content and level of the activities are determined by its level of teaching, research and disciplinary development, as well as faculty and students’ capability of international engagement.

The objectives of Chinese research universities usually include “high-level university and well-known domestically and internationally”, which stipulates the focus of their work is to raise their comprehensive strength and influences. To attain the goal, the universities, when working out their internationalization strategies, should innovate working methods, combine the international cooperation and exchanges with the elevation of the core competence and international influences; service the disciplinary construction, the teaching and research, and the faculty and students; and incorporate it into the construction of discipline, the education of talents, scientific research and social services. The universities also need to enhance the cooperation and exchanges with the first-rate universities, research institutions, disciplines and scholars in the world, proactively apply for international research projects or participate in such cooperation, introduce high-quality foreign educational resources, explore feasible models of international education, and improve the faculty and students’ awareness and capacity of international engagement. In the coming years, the working policies of the international cooperation and exchanges of China’s research universities should mainly focus on enhancing planning, broadening channels, enlarging the scale, raising the level, and focus on key points and emphasize productivity.

3.2 Forms of the international cooperation and exchanges of research universities

The international cooperation and exchanges of Chinese research universities should adopt different ways of

education at different levels: graduate, undergraduate and adult education students. The students' goals and capability of international cooperation and exchanges are divergent. Therefore the outcome can be maximized only by making full use of high-quality foreign educational resources at different levels according to their real conditions through appropriate planning and organization.

(1) The graduate education should be Chinese-foreign joint education in close connection with cooperative research projects. The purpose of graduate education is to get training for research. This type of students are solid in theoretical background and strong in the conduction of research work. They have research funding support and are flexible in the time of courses. Therefore Chinese-foreign joint education in close connection with cooperative research projects will best fit them. In the course of the joint education, they can invite their foreign supervisors to China for supervision or just travel to the host institution for direct research and ultimately enable them to research at the international level. The universities should also endeavor to raise funding to encourage and support graduate students to go abroad for academic conferences and to publish papers in foreign academic journals, which are all feasible ways to broaden their international academic vision and lead them to the international academic arena as quickly as possible.

(2) The undergraduate education should introduce foreign educational resources. The universities should employ international scholars to teach academic courses, utilize original textbooks and advanced educational ideas, reform the curricula and teaching methods, all of which are an attempt to improve the undergraduate teaching quality as a whole. To equip the students with the competence of international exchanges, the universities can set up intensive foreign language training programs, host international summer camps in China, and develop extracurricular international exchange activities. To provide some students with affordability the opportunity to gain the experience of international study, the universities can send them to study abroad through exchange programs in their 3rd and 4th years, and recognize their academic credits earned at the partner universities. However the number of those undergraduate students for international study cannot be large limited by their language proficiency, academic level and affordability.

(3) The adult education should be concentrated on the introduction of professional certificate and professional training. At present, with the mature of the laws and regulations of employment and professional qualification, the direction of adult education at universities is changing. Professional training will become an important part of adult education. The introduction of high-quality international professional certificate training program will help the trainees to prepare for passing different qualification tests and being granted internationally recognized certificate, which will enable them to work abroad or enter international corporations and joint ventures, and thus enrich and elevate their choices of employment at the same time.

(4) The education of out-of-quota students should rely on Chinese-foreign cooperative education programs. With the support of Chinese government and legislation to the Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools, many universities have established cooperative institutes to provide higher education to out-of-quota students. The universities shall design cooperative programs to attract students based on their own educational resources and social needs. These programs should directly make full use of high-quality foreign educational resources for better productivity.

4. Tactics of the international cooperation and exchanges of research universities

Generally, the international cooperation and exchanges of Chinese research universities can be summarized

as basic work and special programs. The basic work refers to the overall tasks, it is the surface; while the special programs are some highlighted projects, which is the points. The best outcome can only be achieved through the combination of points and surface according the real situation of the universities.

4.1 Basic work

The basic work of the research universities should include: (1) promoting international cooperation and exchanges domestically and internationally; (2) formulating rules and regulations; (3) inviting foreign experts and send faculty abroad; (4) cooperating with foreign universities and research institutions; (5) introducing high-quality foreign educational resources and advanced science and technology; (6) opening courses that can strengthen students' capability of international communication; (7) fostering the mutual recognition of academic credits with world-class universities; (8) undertaking student exchanges and educate international students; and (9) carrying out international exchanges in various forms and creating an international atmosphere for the faculty and students, with the purpose of promoting their all-round development. The above work will facilitate the overall development of the international cooperation and exchanges of the whole university, build a public platform of international communication for all faculty and students, and showcase their general style and features.

4.2 Special programs

The special programs refer to individual Chinese-foreign joint education or research programs. Their level, quality and outcome are backed and constrained by above basic work. The special programs grow colorful on the soil of the basic work and highlight it in reverse. They can bring leap to the construction of a specific discipline, educate a number of high-level special talents with special knowledge structure, become a signature and momentum of the international cooperation and exchanges, create a few branded disciplines, increase the social influence, and attract more high-quality students to the university.

5. Priorities of the international cooperation and exchanges of research universities

(1) Increasing the publicity of the international cooperation and exchanges, creating the structure of “great foreign affairs”

The office for the international cooperation and exchanges of an institution of higher education has a very important mission to publicize the significance of the international cooperation and exchanges across the campus and trumpet about the idea of “great foreign affairs”. It must make all administrative offices, schools and research institutes understand that the work is the internal need of the development of the institution. And they must include the work as part of their working plan and set up dedicated funding to guarantee its implementation. The office must offer all faculty and students the awareness of active international engagement in their daily work and create the structure of “great foreign affairs”.

(2) Devising the working plan and rules and regulations, guiding and normalize the work of international cooperation and exchanges

The office must investigate and formulate the overarching and stage objectives, as well as the working plan, map out and crystallize matching incentive policy by the full consultation of expertise according to the overarching development objectives and current priorities of the universities. At the same time, it shall set up a standard administrative system to guarantee the international cooperation and exchanges of the whole university to be operated efficiently, legally, and productively with high quality.

(3) Increasing the international publicity of the university, providing opportunities for the faculty and

students to participate in the international cooperation and exchanges

Another important task of the office is to try its best to increase the international publicity of the university and provide convenience, create opportunities and build platform for the faculty and students to engage in international cooperation and exchanges. The office must use all chances and occasions to advertise the features and advantages of the university's education, make public the capability of international interactions and world-class teaching and research achievements, build excellent academic reputation and international image for the faculty and students, and increase international publicity and attraction. The office shall plan and send more delegations abroad, negotiate with high-level foreign universities and research institutions, sign cooperative and exchange agreements, and plan large international academic events, joint student education programs and research collaboration programs, which will create more opportunities for the faculty and students to go out for international academics and research.

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