

## Education for International Understanding in the Internationalization of Chinese Higher Education

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With the rapid development of economic globalization, the booming of knowledge-driven economies, the quick paced construction of the information highway, the inclusion of higher education into GATS(General Agreement on Trade in Services) by WTO, and the ever-increasing number of internationally cultural and educational activities and international students, the internationalization in higher education has become an inevitable trend in China as well as in the rest of the world. Like a coin has two sides, while giving huge opportunities to Chinese higher education, this trend has brought Chinese Higher education formidable challenges.

On the one hand, the modernization, market expansion, institutional reform and innovation of Chinese higher education are provided with golden opportunities to strive for the better on the other hand, challenges are presented in every aspect of the higher education system,

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from structure, operation, resources, to curricula, teacher training and research. However, Chinese higher education, like always, will not abandon opportunities because of risks and challenges. Since the Open-door policy, China's political and economic reform has developed from learning and introducing advanced technology from developed countries to actively participating in international co-operations and competitions, not only in political and economic realms, but also in culture and education. Our entry into WTO and the successful hosting of the Olympic Games are just two small cases of proof.

We embrace opportunities and welcome challenges. But in the process of internalization, Chinese higher education should take the education for international understanding (EIU) into the scheme, to ensure its final success.

## **I . The Internalization of Chinese Higher Education**

Internationalization of higher education is defined by Jane Knight and Hans de Wit (Knight 2005) as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural and/or global dimension into the goals, functions (teaching/learning, research, services) and delivery of higher education”. According to OECD, it is “the complex of processes whose combined effect, whether planned or not, is to enhance the international

dimension of the experience of higher education in universities and similar educational institutions”.

The internationalization of higher education encompasses various aspects. It requires all the nations to elevate the level of higher education so as to be recognized internationally. It asks for all the nations to open their education to the world market. It emphasizes the international communication and cooperation among nations to share educational resources. It also calls for the innovation of concepts, functions and approaches in higher education to adapt to international development. In China, higher education as a whole has achieved tremendously in the past decades in its process of internalization.

Firstly, China has opened its educational market to the world and has consequently enriched its educational resources. According to China Ministry of Education, since China's reform, 178 nations and regions have established educational co-operation and communication relations with China, and more than 100 bilateral and multilateral agreements and plans have been signed. Universities in the US, Canada, Australia, UK and many other countries have cooperated with Chinese universities in opening joint schools, colleges, and programs. Such co-operations have not only helped improving the quality of our higher education, but also provided opportunities for more people to receive a higher education.

Secondly, the number of students going abroad to study and the number of international students coming to China to study are both

increasing rapidly. According to China Ministry of Education, based on the statistics from our embassies to 128 countries, from 1978 to the end of 2005, the total number of Chinese students studying abroad has mounted to 9, 334, 000, among whom 2, 329, 000 have returned to China. By studying abroad, we have the access to the high quality higher education in some developed countries where our students can have opportunities to learn about advanced science and technology. By admitting international students to Chinese universities, we are able to introduce our cultural heritage to the world.

At the same time, thanks to the internationalization, new concepts of modern educational theories, management, and universal criteria in quality control and evaluation have been introduced to China together with advanced science and technology. Internet education and distance education between Chinese universities and between Chinese and foreign universities are common. TOEFL, GRE, and IELTS are no new words to Chinese college students. Furthermore, English tests like PETS and HSK, which modeled after some international tests but catering to our own needs have been developed.

In addition, all forms of academic mobility, research collaboration, international development projects in universities, curricular aspects in terms of the scope of programs and courses (area studies) offered or changes in curriculum of specific disciplines have been brought about and enhanced by the internationalization of Chinese higher education

and have led Chinese higher education to modernization.

Last but not least, English teaching has been unprecedentedly attached with great importance. In Chinese colleges and universities, English is an obligatory course, the success of which determines the success of a student. There have been several rounds of English teaching reforms, carried out under the government's supervision, aiming at improving Chinese college students' English proficiency. CET (College English Test) Band 4 and Band 6 are very popular English tests, and research on English learning and teaching prosper.

However, in the process of the internationalization of Chinese higher education, problems and challenges coexist with benefits. The inequality in degree recognition of colleges and universities from developed countries, the commercialization of the once sacred Chinese education, esp. higher education, the ever-severe higher education market competition, and worst of all, the political, cultural and value influences from developed countries to China, which are dissolving Chinese traditional heritage and beliefs, are all by-products of the internationalization. In combating with these problems, Chinese government has taken many measures. The author observes the importance of and proposes the implementation of, education for international understanding(EIU).

## II. The Importance of Education for International Understanding in Chinese Higher Education

It is quoted from Towards a Century of Cooperation: Internationalization of Higher Education that, “It is imperative that higher education offer solutions to existing problems and innovate to avoid problems in the future. Whether in the economic, political, or social realms, higher education is expected to contribute to raising the overall quality of life, world wide. To fulfill its role effectively and maintain excellence, higher education must become far more internationalized; it must integrate an international and intercultural dimension into its teaching, research, and service functions”.

Education for International Understanding(EIU), is educational activities based on international understanding, the goal of which is to enhance the mutual understanding and tolerance between people from different backgrounds, races, and religions in different countries, regions and areas; to promote their co-operation so that they can recognize and deal with major issues facing people on the globe; to understand well themselves in order to understand others well, and to turn the fact of interdependence to conscious and initiative help of one another.

In the face of globalization, it is acknowledged by all that those talents who have an international awareness and intercultural communication abilities are more competitive and advantageous in the present day

world. The education of personnel with these traits should be the goal of education, and will surely determine the success or failure of the internationalization of higher education.

The internationalization of Chinese higher education, therefore, should not be confined within the framework of educating young people for the needs of China only. It should have an international vision and set its goal on the teaching and training of young people for the world, or, for the ever-severe competitions of the world. In other words, the internationalization of Chinese higher education is to prepare Chinese young people to have, apart from knowledge and skills, international competence of understanding and communication, to cater for the changes in our life brought about by changes in the world.

The ultimate purpose of internationalization of higher education is to educate highly internationalized personnel who have the skills of international and intercultural communication, who have the abilities of solving problems in an international context, and above all, who have international visions and sympathetic hearts to understand people and issues in the world well and to think globally, thus to help reduce conflicts and to reach and keep peace and harmony. Chinese higher education has advanced in strides in its internationalization, but there is still a long way to go to attain this goal. One effective and influential way of accelerating the success of the internationalization of Chinese higher education is to strengthen and deepen international understanding

among the students and teachers in higher educational institutions, which can be made possible by EIU.

### III. Tentative Suggestions for Implementing Education for International Understanding in Chinese Higher Education

Chinese higher education has taken big steps towards internationalization. To include EIU into the Chinese educational reform, China needs to do many things. But it is the author of this paper's opinion that the following 6 things must be attached with great importance and must be accomplished.

(1) Making EIU and its importance to as many people as possible, if not all, in China. EIU and its importance have been acknowledged by many UN member countries and people. However, if China is to implement EIU into higher education, the meaning and importance of EIU must be acknowledged by all the people, from the government to the common folks, from the teachers to the students, in order to win their hearty support. EIU aims at educating young people to master social and communication skills, basic skills for international understanding; to know about global issues such as world peace and sustainable development; ecological balance, international organizations



and peace-keeping; and to understand culture and life in other countries than China, multi-cultural co-existence, interdependent world relations, and international communication and cooperation, etc. Equipped with such knowledge and understanding, the younger generation of Chinese future elites will develop respect and tolerance towards different cultures and peoples, and develop a sense of being a “global citizen”. These international qualities, as the core value of EIU, will eventually help to build up a world culture of peace, can be incorporated into the goal of Chinese education only when most Chinese people realize its nature.

(2) Merging EIU into school curricula. At the time of educational reform, many curricula are undergoing changes and innovations. Some are changed to adapt to the demands of the society, others are changed to follow international standards as a result of internationalization. To make sure that EIU is successfully implemented into Chinese higher education, it is an effective approach that EIU is merged into school curricula. For example, we can merge EIU into courses like cultural studies, language studies, political and social studies, etc. Perhaps a required course called EIU can also be offered to students, in which they do autonomous learning, explorative learning and co-operative learning, and to develop their understanding and analytical abilities.

(3) Taking Chinese culture and tradition into consideration. EIU is

two-way. On the one hand, EIU can develop a student's international understanding; on the other, EIU should also develop a student's respect and understanding of his/her own culture and tradition, so as to communicate with people in other countries with a spirit of equality and fraternity. Chinese culture and tradition have contributed greatly to the world civilization, and should be indispensable parts of EIU. As a "global citizen", one must at first be a citizen of his/her own country and has a profound understanding of his/her own culture.

(4) Train teachers in the teaching of EIU. The success of EIU largely depends on the teachers involved in EIU, because they are the people who carry out EIU, who instill EIU into the teaching and curricula, and who themselves have a deep international understanding. Teachers in China are called "the soul builders". Their role in the shaping of a student's mentality is beyond doubt. China has a history of honoring and following teachers' instructions, so, to reinforce EIU in Chinese higher education, proper and effective teacher training on the teachers' EIU and on how to conduct EIU for the teachers are essential.

(5) Introducing the Chinese language and culture to the world. This may seem to be irrelevant when discussing EIU, but it is indeed closely related to the success of EIU. China is such a big and important country in the world. It has a long history and rich cultural heritage,

and is called an “awakened dragon in the east”. To understand the world, one should understand Asia; to understand Asia, one should understand China. In the process of EIU, China also needs to be understood. As a matter of fact, many countries have shown great interest in China, for example, people who are learning Chinese and interested in Chinese culture are increasing rapidly, and many Confucius schools have been opened across the world. Still, much remains to be done.

(6) Strengthening foreign language learning. Foreign language learning has an unquestionable importance in international communication. To be able to use languages of other countries can not only ensure the smooth communication and co-operation, but also show respect to other countries. It is also a tool to learn about the culture and people of other countries. In the past decades, thanks to the "Open-door" policy, foreign language learning in Chinese higher education has made huge progress. But in the aspect of EIU, foreign language learning (not just English learning, though it's very important), needs to be further strengthened. International communication should be added to language teaching materials. More native speakers of foreign languages should be invited to teach students about foreign languages and cultures. Teachers and students should be provided with more opportunities to learn a foreign language in the native country to learn the language and

understand the people and culture.

#### IV. Conclusion

The awareness, knowledge, skills, and attitudes of international understanding of citizens of a country are criteria of measuring a country's power and potential. They are also the essential qualities future human civilization. China's rising status in the world demands its people to have these qualities and an international vision, and EIU can help with that. However, EIU in Chinese higher education takes time and efforts, and will need the co-operation in and out of Chinese higher education in and out of China. Good news is that according to our MOE's plan for the year 2008, China's focus of higher education is to "deepen and broaden all-sided educational co-operations with foreign educational institutions and international organizations like UNESCO". Hence, we have sound reason to believe that the days when EIU is introduced into Chinese higher education, and many Chinese people have international understanding to world issues, will not be too far away.

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