

On the Optimization of International Talent Training Mechanism of Chinese Universities

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Abstract: *In the context of the shortage of high-level international talents, almost all of Chinese universities have attached great importance to international talent training. On the basis of analysis on the current situation and deficiencies of international talent training of Chinese universities, this research aims to discuss how to accelerate the internationalization of talent training and optimize the international talent training mechanism of Chinese universities, trying to make some practical suggestions for Chinese universities future efforts in international talent training.*

Keywords: *International talent training, Chinese universities, Optimization*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, countries all over the world are frequently participating in international exchanges, coping with the opportunities and challenges brought by international affairs. At the same time, people have witnessed the fact that the demand for international talents is maintaining rapid growth. This demand reminds universities across the world of putting the talent training function with higher requirements on the table, which is to cultivate more and higher-quality international talents. Therefore, this article aims to research the optimization of international talents training in Chinese context, attempting to answer the following questions:

- What should the mission of international talent training in Chinese universities be?
- What is the current status and what are the existing problems as regards international talent training in Chinese universities?
- What should Chinese universities do to optimize their training mechanisms to cultivate more outstanding international talents?

2. The connotation of international talent training

What kind of international talents should universities endeavor to cultivate? In response to this important issue, the first thing we should do is to make it clear what the mission of international talent training is. The answer to the question is inseparable from one key word “global competence”. The definition of global competence given by PISA (Program for International Student Assessment, an international assessment of student competencies coordinated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) includes four dimensions. They are the ability to analyze regional, global and cross-cultural issues; the ability to understand and appreciate the perspectives and worldviews of others; the ability to engage in open, appropriate, and effective cross-cultural interactions; the ability to act for the common well-being and sustainable development of humankind^[1]. As forerunner in the field of international talent training in China, Tsinghua university is focusing on six elements to cultivate students' global competence: world knowledge and global issues; language; openness and respect; communication and collaboration; self-awareness and self-confidence; ethics and responsibility^[2]. With these indicators we can summarize the connotation of internationalized talents with global competence as follows: internationalized talents refer to high-level talents who have an international awareness, a sense of concern and responsibility for humanity and the world, a world-class knowledge structure and high level of expertise that is enough for global competition.

3. The necessity of strengthening international talents training in Chinese universities

Since internationalization has become an inevitable trend in the development of higher education in the world. There is no doubt that the level of international talents training has become an index to examine the development of education in a global perspective. Many countries consider strengthening international talent training as a national development strategy, instead of an educational policy [3]. It is due to the expectations from society for universities and university's development that the cultivation of international talents cannot be ignored or delayed.

3.1. A new requirement for the functions of universities in the era of globalization

In the context of globalization, international exchanges and cooperation are becoming increasingly frequent, and challenges in the fields of environment, energy and security need to be addressed by global collaboration. High-level international talents are urgently needed. International competitiveness also has become an important criterion for employers all over the world to select their candidates [4]. Accordingly, China, as a fast-growing economy, has a great demand for international talents. Chinese universities have the responsibility to respond to the demand and expectation.

3.2. A matter of the prospects of universities and students

In China, the quality of international talent training is of great importance for Chinese universities' "double first—class" construction. More importantly, internationalization is a necessary way and important means for universities to reach a world-class level. In recent years, many Chinese universities have achieved outstanding results in world university rankings, but in general, Chinese universities still need to improve their reputation and influence in the world. Various world university rankings show that the best universities in the world are mostly British and American, mainly because of their strong ability to attract and deliver top talents from and to the world. Among these two aspects, delivering high-quality talents is the fundamental task and ultimate goal of universities [5]. It also means that universities should view the training of international talents as their top priority if they are seeking to enhance global reputation.

4. Deficiencies in current international talent training mechanism

Although higher education of China has made great progress in internationalization, the advantages Chinese universities gained from this are still relatively weak in the current fierce international competition environment. The international talents cultivated by Chinese universities at present have not yet fully met the needs of national development and the needs of the international community in terms of quantity and quality. The reason for this is that there are still some deficiencies in current international talent training mechanism.

4.1. Inequality: regional differences in the level of international talent training

On the whole, Chinese students studying at universities located in economically developed regions are exposed to more international competency development programs than students in other less developed regions. Some universities with supporting capabilities in China, such as Tsinghua University, provide more platforms for students to help them cultivate global competence. In 2018, Tsinghua University established a special institution called Center for Global Competence Development. This center is dedicated to providing guidance, support and resources for all students on global competence development, and to promoting the integration of global competence development into the student cultivation process [2]. Other universities in China also attach great importance to the cultivation of students' global competence. However, it is more because of economic reasons, the level of internationalization of talent cultivation in various universities is not even. International exchange programs and teaching activities on global competence have been carried out mostly in some universities which are located in developed regions, forming a relatively complete curriculum system and training model, while global competency education in other regions, especially in the less developed areas of the central and western regions of China, is still at a low level.

4.2. Insufficiency: a lack of platforms for international talent training

International cooperation and international exchange projects play an increasingly important role in the international talent training. In recent years, a large number of students in China have had some opportunities to study abroad or have been exposed to international exchanges at home through all kind of platforms. In 2019, the total number of people studying abroad reached 703,500 ^[6]. However, compared with the large number of Chinese students, the population is still relatively small. The fact is that current cooperation and exchange programs between domestic universities and foreign universities still can't meet the demand of domestic students, which is also particularly evident in universities located in central and western regions.

4.3. Incompetency: a relatively low level of internationalization of faculty

The educational conditions of many Chinese universities have been significantly improved with the continuous deepening of higher education reform and the rapid development of higher education. A considerable number of teachers in Chinese universities have overseas studying experience. Nevertheless, when they finish their studies and return home, most of them just focus on their areas of expertise, limiting themselves to reading and writing papers in English, and cannot take good use of overseas experience to teach and to study new teaching methods. Compared with world-class universities, for the most part the internationalization of the teaching staff in Chinese universities still needs further improvement.

4.4. Incompleteness: demands for more language courses and interdisciplinary courses

The University of Michigan offers courses in foreign languages, general studies, and professional studies to cultivate students' ability. There are more than 40 foreign language courses in different languages for students, laying a solid language foundation of communication. In contrast, the international curriculum system of most domestic universities is far away from completeness. According to statistic of Wang's study, 62.2% of students in her research believe that college majors lack internationalization characteristics ^[7]. The problem is not only about the number of courses, but also the quality of courses. Current curriculum in domestic universities either lacks reference to international knowledge, or copies too much from foreign courses, resulting in a lack of connections between domestic and international knowledge.

5. Suggestions for Chinese universities on International Talent Training

How to improve current situation is a problem that needs to be solved urgently in front of Chinese universities. Universities should formulate an international talent training model that is in line with their own development by combining the geographical location and the actual situation of the school, and highlights their own characteristics, so as to accelerate its internationalization process.

5.1. Create more international exposure

More and more employers are now seeking globally minded employees, particularly those with international experience. They believe those who are globally minded more likely respect diversity and can be more creative. A survey reveals that many recruiters form preferences for certain universities largely based on the international exposure graduates could have had at university. Limited opportunities for international exchange make it difficult for scientific research to penetrate into the forefront of related research fields, resulting in low-level duplication of scientific research results and lack of original results, which seriously restricts students' development.

On one hand, universities should improve both frequency and depth of international exchange activities, rather than limit international academic exchanges and cooperation activities to sightseeing and knowing-and-understanding study activities, which is not conducive to the improvement of students' abilities and the improvement of the reputation and academic influence of the university

On the other hand, in view of the low proportion of teachers with overseas studying experience and the shortage of funds in universities located in the central and western regions of China, it is unlikely for such universities to recruit teachers and academic masters with first-class international competence in large quantities. In contrast, it is easier to create an international learning environment at home by

attracting foreign students. There are success stories in this regard. As a non-English speaking nation, Japan is attracting more and more foreign students by setting various exchange programs and providing sufficient support. The foreign students in Japan would approximately account for roughly 10% of Japan's total student population. This is a proportion which could bring Japan closer to the proportion of foreign students in Germany and France. And this proportion also means more international exposure become available to local students in Japan. We can also draw some inspiration from Japan's measures.

5.2. Reform and refine the curriculum

The internationalization of the curriculum is one of the most important characteristics of world-class universities. Language has been one of the biggest barriers to international talent training. universities should develop more classes, summer courses and programs in English or other most spoken Languages. However, the internationalization of university courses not only refers to the fact that some courses are taught in common languages. but also includes that the curriculum system has an international orientation or contains several courses with international characteristics. Courses for cultivating international talents should not be limited to language and professional knowledge, they should also focus more on cultivating students' tolerance, empathy, global awareness and sense of responsibility, and help them learn to explore and cope with the unknown and changeable world from an objective perspective.

Furthermore, it is also necessary to break down the boundaries between different disciplines and different cultures. One of the important purposes of the curriculum setting should be to bring students from different countries and different cultural backgrounds together, so that students may build more international understanding and international awareness in the teaching process. Universities should develop more online courses and more interdisciplinary courses to shorten the geographical distance between different countries and the distance between different disciplines.

5.3. Build an internationalized faculty team

If a university strives to cultivate world-class international talents and become a world-class university, one of the necessary steps is to build a world-class faculty. Universities should put forward higher requirements for teachers' competence, including teachers' international vision and cross-cultural literacy. Teachers are ideally required to have international level of professional knowledge and outstanding foreign language application ability to help universities achieve a higher degree of internationalization of the curriculum, thus enhancing the effect of international talent training. In addition to recruit celebrated scholars all over the world, great importance should be attached to providing teachers more opportunities for further education to promote the internationalization of the teaching staff, including international cooperation and exchange of teachers in academic knowledge, scientific research and other aspects.

5.4. Provide targeted financial support

Economic development significantly relies on international talents, and the cultivation of international talents also relies on the support of economy. Statistics reveal that international students contribute more than £20 billion annually to the UK economy. If we switch the perspective, we will react that this exactly demonstrates how important financial support is for students who want to study abroad or have experience in international exchanges. If a student from an ordinary family is able to get an opportunity to participate in an international exchange program, the tuition fee is still a big issue for him. It is due to such practical considerations that universities should found more scholarships targeted at foreign students and students who will go abroad for exchanges.

5.5. Prepose the international training stage

The cultivation of any ability is a gradual process, and it is always not an easy task. Now Chinese universities are more committed to the development of postgraduate students' global competence, while there is less relevant education at other stages of education. The proportion of undergraduate students with overseas studying experience is smaller than that of graduate students with overseas studying experience. In fact, universities should provide more opportunities for undergraduate students to cultivate students' global awareness during their undergraduate period, or even earlier, so that they can form an open, inclusive, cooperative, shared, and responsible attitude as soon as possible, which is of great benefit to the cultivation of international talents.

6. Conclusion

Form what we have discussed above, we can draw the conclusion that Chinese universities have to cultivate more and higher-level international talents to adapt to the current international environment and to have an even broader prospect for development. And they should recognize that the shortcomings in their existing international talent training mechanism, which is summarized by the author as “4I”: “inequality”, “insufficiency”, “incompetency” and “incompleteness”, bring so much restriction to international talent training in Chinese universities. Based on that status, the author hold that Chinese universities should spare no effort to create more international exposure for students and teachers, reform and refine the curriculum with more international and more practical standards, build an internationalized faculty team, provide more targeted financial support and put the international training stage at earlier learning stage of students to further optimize the existing international talent training mechanism.

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