

Internationalization and International Understanding through Higher Education - the Experience of Chinese Higher Education

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Abstract: Universities of the 21st century need to face the objective realities of multi-cultural societies and of multi-civilization squarely, consciously absorb what other cultures have to offer all around the world, and take up new responsibility to train citizens of the world. Chinese education not only strengthens international understanding by promoting the internationalization of its universities, but also actively develops cultural exchanges and cooperation by founding Confucius Institutes to promote the harmonious development of the world's many cultures.

Key words: international understanding, higher education, way, China

At the beginning of the 21st century, the conflicts between countries are continually escalating and intensifying under the background of globalization, which makes international understanding education face bigger challenges. As globalization involves more and more problems, international understanding education covers almost all the issues related to international education, such as global education, peace education, human rights education, multi-cultural education, environmental education, and so on. In this paper we try to make use of the experience of Chinese higher education to research a feasible system for teaching international understanding, and we look for its **moral support** for the world's harmonious development, to promote the joint progress of the people of the world.

1. Universities of the 21st century should take new responsibility for training citizens of the world

International understanding education is in fact a kind of personnel quality education aiming to promote the world's peaceful co-existence through education, which is initiated and pushed forward by international peace organizations and UNESCO, and takes international understanding as its ideal. International understanding is a long-term bilateral understanding & exchanging activity, whose goal is to understand the politics, economics and culture of other countries as well as to actively seek understanding from other countries. Its essence is to uphold life, dignity & equality, to unearth universality and common denominators of human nature, to respect the diversity of human value, and to live with each other, so that the conflicts between countries will be decreased, especially in the fields of ideology, political regime and religious belief.

It is an objective fact that many cultures and civilizations co-exist, which needs to be faced by international understanding education. Different cultures make the world rich and colorful, and because of their differences, we should respect the cultural traditions of each country and understand their cultures and national spirits. In the book *Clash of Civilizations*, the author Huntington suggests that all the international violence and clashes after the end of Cold War were derived from cultural and religious differences. However, the international situation and

reality shows that differences of culture or civilizations don't necessarily cause clashes. As a matter of fact, the basic cause of such clashes is not culture but politics or economics. So we need to accept the multi-culture to maintain the world's safety. In the year 2001, the 31st UNESCO ministerial conference passed the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, which points out that cultural diversity is humanity's common heritage, and culture has different form of expression in different times and regions. And just such cultural diversity forms the uniqueness and diversity of different groups and societies¹.

International understanding works through international exchange and cooperation. Over its long history, each culture goes through a process of birth, rise and fall. No cultural exchange, no development. Exchange between different cultures is inevitable, and no one can resist it. From ancient times to present, there is no culture that has not been influenced by foreign culture². During the more than one thousand years from 7th to 17th century AD, China's material civilization and system of civilization had affected Korea (South Korea), Japan, Okinawa, Vietnam, etc extensively, which formed a Cultural Circle of Ancient Chinese Characters or Cultural Circle of East Asian Imperial Examination System. After the Sino-British Opium War in 1845, intellectuals of China, even the whole of East Asia started and continued to learn from the Western countries. After the Pre-Qin period, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam began to spread in China and finally completed their process of localization, namely sinicizations. Among them, Buddhism especially, which began to spread in China during the Eastern Han Dynasty, had a big impact on Chinese culture during a long term passing-down and mutual exchange, assimilating with and influencing Chinese culture. Along with Confucian and Taoist culture, it constituted three basic pillars of Chinese traditional culture. When Buddhism was introduced into China, on one hand we selected its essence from a good number of Buddhist documents and identified its doctrine and practical method according to China's conditions; on the other hand we merged those chosen contents with Chinese culture and then broadened them into the thick of mass life, forming Buddhism with Chinese characteristics³.

Universities of the 21st century need to bear the moral and legal obligations of cultivating world citizens. As a public product, higher education of course should shoulder the responsibility of a public product. **Education** needs to actively promote citizens' duty and social solidarity. The international community has common interests, which form the legalized basis of the spirit of world citizenship, while the objective existence of multi-culture in the 21st century means that world citizens have universal yet inhomogeneous values and ideals. With the rapid development of network technology, more and more convenient traffic and tourism, and increasing deepening of economic globalization, the relationships of interdependence and mutual competition become more evident and a historic field of global civil society has formed. In such a field, the higher education of each country urgently needs

¹Wan Ming gang & L i Yanhong . Educational Ideal and Practice of "Learning to Live Together"[J]. Journal of Educational Rresearch.2006,(12):p.18.

² Cai Degui. Mr. Ji Xianlin's theory of "the complementation of eastern and western cultures" [J].Journal of China Youth College for Political Sciences.2001,(4).

³ Luo Yingguang .On the Spreading and Local ization of Buddhism,Christianity and Islam in China[J]. Journal of Sichuan University (Social Science Edition).2005,(6):p.80.

to recognize the importance of international understanding education and its moral and legal responsibility for cultivating citizens of the world, to make its citizens be guided and bound by global civil society, to avoid as much as possible the vulnerability and absence of economic ethics in capital managers, to avoid the extreme polarization of the livelihood of world citizens, and to avoid depletion of natural resources, environmental deterioration and strained human relations. Otherwise, the global economy will fade and social crises will follow. A political response to globalization, suggested by Beck, the famous German scholar, is to establish and extend education and the knowledge-based society, and to make the educational process aim at a cultivation of critical abilities, such as social ability, team capacity, conflict-resolving ability, cultural understanding, etc¹. In 1998, UNESCO released a public announcement on 21st century higher education which advocated that higher education, along with other fields, should serve according to the world's demands and engage itself in creating a more just, tolerant and responsible society.²

To foster world citizens' humanistic spirit, it is necessary for each country's higher education to consciously absorb the intelligence and nutrition of each other's culture. Now what the international understanding education confronts is the extreme development that leads to antagonism between countries, while the concept of cosmopolitanism implies a West-centric hegemony, so that college students from the third world, including China, have taken learning from the West more as their only way to international recognition rather than a method of absorbing knowledge³. To get rid of the above two dilemmas, it is no wonder that we need to draw nutrition and intelligence from all the excellent cultures in the world, and to have a broader humanistic spirit. At present, under the background of globalization, the traditional Chinese Confucian cultural spirit of kindness, harmony without uniformity, humanitarianism and peace, the natural idea of harmony between man and nature, which is a significant contribution to the world's civilization in Islamic ecological civilization, the philosophy of modern citizens which cares about civil affairs, politics, social rights and contracts and the cultural spirit of freedom, equality and legality in the western world, are obviously all necessary for building a harmonious world. Of course, the fact that lays stress on the humanistic spirit of world citizens does not deny the university the right to train nationalistic citizens. Actually, there is no education in the world that produces potentially straying citizens; all these citizens have a national identity and their own cultural base. With the European economic integration, today European education is also promoting the sense of a European citizen, and desiring their universities to play a leading role in protecting and advocating those moral values⁴.

2. Strengthen international understanding education in the process of internationalization of universities

Internationalization of universities is inherent in the international character of modern universities. Since the founding of universities in Medieval Europe, their most laudable

¹ Yang Shanhua & Xie Zhongli. *Sociology Theory of West* [M]. Beijing University Publishing House, 2006, p. 141.

² United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (1998, October 5-9). Higher education in the twenty-first century: Vision and action.

³ Yang Tian & Deng Lei. The characteristics of Universities and the Educating of World Citizens in China [J]. *Journal of International Education*. 2009, (2): p. 26.

⁴ [Italy] 吉玛娜·怀瑞, Luo Yanhua (interpreter). Challenges to the Academic——Under the Background of Globalization [J]. *Journal of International Education*, 2005, (2): p. 15.

characteristics have turned out to be World Spirit and Transnationalism: Latin was the uniform language for educating students from country to country, while the Universalists managed to integrate the world through knowledge under an atmosphere of learning without borders.¹ In essence, science is universal and internationalism is based on its universality. From this point forward, universities should be at the fore of international communication and improvement of international understanding.

In terms of its contents, Internationalization of universities includes the transnational flow of students and teachers, the participation of international conferences and congresses, and even the participation of cooperative studies on international research projects. All of those projects could help universities play an essential role in establishing a harmonious world. Research has shown that, on the basis of international cooperation, scientific progress would promote the course of peace. Universities are important places for cultivating the universal leaders who have international concepts and intercultural knowledge. When Heisenberg gave a lecture for foreign students in Humboldt, he said, "Making contact with our country, you should not lessen your loyalty to your mother land. We sincerely hope that when you return home, you should clearly realize the state of tension among all kinds of different world views, even the differences between scientific and traditional ways of life. This may be the most contribution you could make to world peace, for it can help spread a kind of consciousness that although there are completely different modes of thinking around the world, the substantive contents they represent are exactly the same."² A German student who studied abroad in universities for many years wrote, "The greatest influence on me from my study-abroad experience is that it has made me learn to be tolerant, to consider questions in comparative perspective, and to accept another way of life while doubting that I am always absolutely correct."³ Ikeda Daisaku pointed out that to pay more attention to foreign students is, indeed, to attach importance to the future of the world, for foreign students will lie in the position of leadership in their own countries.⁴

Chinese higher education attaches high importance to the internationalization of universities, adhering to the principal that "Education should be oriented towards modernization, the world and the future". Since the policy of reform and opening up was launched in 1978, China has highly encouraged and supported international exchanges and cooperation in higher education. Now the Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Academic Degrees has been signed between China and 34 countries, and over 40 key international organizations have been keeping in communication and maintaining cooperative relationships with China. On the issue of overseas education, we not only put emphasis on sending our own students out, but think highly of bringing foreign students into China. The specific numbers of study-abroad students and overseas students in 1978 and from 1999 to 2008 are presented in the following table:

¹Tian Yang, Lei Deng. The Character of University and Cosmopolite Cultivation by China's Colleges [J]. International Higher Education, 2009, (2): P.25.

²Cited in [Brazil] Jose Raymundo Matins Romeo, Translated by Yuiqin Liu. Higher Education in Latin America [J]. International Higher Education, 2005, (2): PP.42-43

³Cited in [Brazil] Jose Raymundo Matins Romeo, Translated by Yuiqin Liu. Higher Education in Latin America [J]. International Higher Education, 2005, (2): PP.42-43.

⁴Daisaku, Wiming Du. Dialogue of Civilization [M]. Sichuan People's Publishing House, 2007, P.48.

The numbers of study-abroad and visiting students in 1978 & 1999-2008

Years	1978	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Study-abroad (thousand)	0.86	24	39	84	125	117.2	114.6	118.6	133.6	144.5	179.8
Overseas students (thousand)	1.2	44.7	52.2	61.9	85.8	77.7	110.8	141.1	162.7	195.5	223.5

The above data are based on the China Education Yearbook——“Work of Studying abroad”.

From 1978 to the end of 2008, about 1,391,500 Chinese students of all sorts have been sent to foreign countries, among which there were 860 students in 1978 and 179,800 in 2008, rising by about 209.01 fold. Till 2008, there were over 1,000,000 students among those studying abroad¹. From the investigation of Tsinghua University and Beijing University, we can see that though imbalance exists during the process of communication of higher education between China and foreign countries, for example less than 40% of students return home and few of the students choose to learn human sciences, those who went back home have turned into an important bridge for international exchange, played an important role in advancing the international communication between universities, and promoted the academic standards of colleges and universities. Furthermore, they are not only practitioners of domestic education reform, but a backbone force in the service of domestic economic construction.² In terms of the overseas students, there were 1236 students in 1978, while 223,500 students in 2008, increasing by 180 fold. Those overseas students come from 189 countries and regions, studying in 592 higher education institutions throughout the country.³ In fact, international communication and cooperation not only make citizens realize world currency correctly, but also cultivate world citizens that can understand foreign cultures, systems and thinking.

In the wave of internationalization of universities, Nankai University has tried hard to find a new way to strengthen Education for International Understanding, and set up the “Nankai-Aichi pattern” in cooperation with Aichi University (Japan). Aichi University is a peaceful university with a deep Chinese background. Its predecessor is East Asia College which was founded in Shanghai in 1920s, and at the beginning of 1980s Nankai established communication relationships with Aichi. In the mid and late 1990s, in order to meet manpower demands brought about by economic globalization, Aichi University founded the Department of Modern China, which aims to cultivate talents doing communication work respecting the Sino-Japan economy, politics and culture. So as to better acquaint the students with modern China, Nankai University and Aichi University worked together, and started a four-month “On-site Teaching Program” which is especially for students from Aichi

¹ Danguo Miao. Analysis on the Discussion and Research for the Facts and Data Relevant to Study Abroad [J]. World Education Information, 2009, (4):p.92.

² Ling Tian. Research on Foreign Exchange in Chinese Higher Education [M]. Nationalities Publishing House 2003, PP.137\171.

³ Chunfei Xiao. The Overseas Students has Increased by 180 Fold for 30 Years [N]. China Youth Daily ,Apr.2th,2009.

University. In the meanwhile, the students from the Department of Modern China in Aichi University would learn some courses, such as Chinese culture, history, economy and law, etc, which were taught by professors in Nankai University. What's more, they would participate in some relevant social activities, and contact Chinese students and ordinary people. In order to support the cooperative program, both universities collaborated to build an "Aichi Guild Hall" for the use of the visiting Japanese students inside Nankai University. Till now, the program has run for ten years, and there are more than 2,000 students who have come to learn in Nankai University successively. The students not only learned some useful knowledge as required but also acquainted themselves with China and understood China better from their first-hand experience. According to the survey from Aichi University, among the students who have been to China, over 80% of students are willing to go back to China again to learn or communicate. More and more universities give attention to this kind of cooperative style, as several universities like Kokugakuin University have organized some similar cooperative programs with Nankai University.

3. Establishment of Confucius Institute is a new way to strengthen international understanding education for Chinese higher education

In order to strengthen international understanding education, we want to find more and better ways to promote conversation, communication, mutual recognition and respect between different cultures; to maintain universal human values; to show the unique value of self-culture; and to move forward in harmony all over the world.

The establishment of Chinese Confucius Institutes in foreign countries is a new approach to strengthening international understanding education. We aim to advance the dialogue between different cultures and mutual understanding, enhance universal understanding of Chinese language and culture, defend our firm relationship with foreign countries, promote multi-cultural development, and dedicate ourselves to building a harmonious world.

The Confucius Institute is a non-profit educational and cultural institution to promote Chinese language and culture. The first overseas Confucius Institute was set up in Seoul, Korea in 2004. By 2010, China plans to establish 500 Confucius Institutes around the world. According to the data, by December 11th, 2008, China has founded 249 Confucius Institutes and 56 Confucius Classroom in 78 countries and regions, which have opened more than 6000 classes on Chinese language courses at all levels, with an enrollment of 120,000 students, cultural exchanges of 1.2 million participants, a faculty amounting to 2,100 teachers and administrators, an office land and teaching space of about 4.6 million square meters, which covers an area of 96,000 square meters. What's more, there are more than 40 countries and 100 universities and institutions waiting for the approval of NOCFL (National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language).¹ Furthermore, China's first Radio Confucius Institute was established in Beijing on December 6th, 2007, which teaches Chinese to trainees all over the world, in 38 languages, by radio and online radio, to disseminate Chinese culture.

¹ Chen Juewan & Wu Duanyang. Analysis of the Course, Causes and Characteristics of the development of overseas Confucius Institute[J]. Journal of National Academy of Education Administration. 2009,(4): pp.24-26.

Organized by Confucius Institute Headquarters, Network Confucius Institute opened and began operating on March 20th, 2008, providing online courses to global Chinese language learners, teaching resources to the teachers of Chinese, online management and press releases to the Confucius Institute, and other functions.¹ At present, in cooperation with foreign universities, Nankai University has established 5 overseas Confucius Institutes. They are as follows: the first Confucius Institute in the United States--Confucius Institute of University of Maryland; Confucius Institute of Aichi University in Japan ; the first Confucius Institute in Colombia, South America--Confucius Institute of Andean University ; the first Confucius Institute in Portugal, Confucius Institute of University of Minho and Confucius Institute of University of South Florida in the United States.

According to the host country, regional circumstances and people's language learning requirements, Confucius Institute has launched a series of Chinese courses, covering academic and non-academic qualifications, from kindergarten to university, and carried out various activities and services for local people.² For example, the Confucius Institute organized by Nankai University and University of Maryland in November 2004, has formed its running characteristics, which increase overseas and worldwide captivation by China, such as initially going out to recruit students, taking the off-campus classes according to need; taking full advantage of time during the evening, weekends and summer vacation to conduct Chinese language teaching; arranging two or more Chinese cultural activities almost every month, including "Chinese Bridge" competitions for college students, Chinese celebrity lectures, Chinese Film Week, Confucius Reading Council, academic conferences, and so on.³

It is said by Confucius's Golden Mean, that being impartial as a man, then being generous as a government, would make interpersonal relationships friendly and firm, make society harmonious and peaceful, and bring about coexistence among nations. Whether the Golden Mean by Confucius, or the Clash of Civilization by Samuel· Huntington works or not, is tested by practice.⁴ That the Confucius Institute is welcomed by the world shows that the development of world peace needs Confucianism, as well as the active role for higher education to plunge into international cultural exchange positively and initiatively in international understanding education.

China, with a civilization 5,000 years old, prides itself in tremendous accumulation of culture. From the 16th century to the 19th, Westerners who came to China discovered that there is no one in European books who can be compared with Chinese books based on the number of words. The famous American modern scholar, John King Fairbank, demonstrated that the amount of books printed in Chinese before 1750 is larger than the total sum of books printed

¹ Confucius Institute Headquarters & NOCFL. Annual Report of 2007[M]. China Renmin University Press,2007.

² Xu Lihua. The Development of Status, Problems and Trends of Confucius Institute[J]. Zhejiang Normal University Journal (Social Science Edition), 2008(5):pp.26-28.

³ Zhang Zhiguo. Field Study of Confucius Institute of University of Maryland in U.S[J] Cooperation and Communication, 2009,(3):pp.83-84.

⁴ Wang Dao Extracts. Huntington Outmoded, Confucius in mode [N]. Hong Kong DaKung Daily ,Jan.4th,2009. Zixin Hou and Qinghua Liu, Nankai University – IAU Int. Conf. 2009 – NDU Louaize

in all other languages worldwide in his book *The United States and China*.¹ Under the guidance of "pursuit of harmony", "harmony without uniformity" and "golden mean", in the positive and initiative exchange of cultures around the world, Chinese higher education will play a more effective role in the future of international understanding education.

1 [US] John King Fairban author, Zhang Lijing interpretor. *The United States and China*[M]. World Knowledge Publishing House, 2003,p.42.