

Reflections on the Internationalization of Higher Education in Jiangxi

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Abstract

The internationalization of higher education in Jiangxi Province is not only the internal requirement of the development of higher education but the actual demands of Jiangxi's economic development. However, quite a few problems are hindering it, such as laggard ideas about education internationalization, low level of staff internationalization, dissatisfying overseas enrollment, poor international cooperation in running schools, small scale of the international exchanges of information and so on. As a result, in order to promote the internationalization of Jiangxi's higher education, some countermeasures should be taken: enhancing understanding, updating ideas and accelerating relevant projects; sorting out relations and perfecting systems according to actual demands; confirming objectives, giving guidance according to different types and developing individuality; improving teaching quality and developing programs; expanding channels and creating conditions in accordance with local conditions.

Keywords: Jiangxi, Higher education, Internationalization, University, Teachers

It is the reform and opening up policy that has guided Jiangxi's economy and higher education from isolation to openness. The rapid development in Jiangxi's economy has largely promoted that of its higher education and therefore has accelerated the internationalization of its higher education. From the perspective of longitudinal comparison, Jiangxi has made some achievements in higher education internationalization, especially in cooperation in running schools, short-term staff exchanges, inviting foreign experts and professors and so on. However, if compared with other provinces in China, it still lags behind in the whole nation and even in Middle China, especially in internationalization understanding, construction of famous specialties, capital input, long-term staff exchanges and creation of international atmosphere. Therefore, it is quite necessary to have objective analysis on the current situation of Jiangxi's higher education internationalization and to seek for reasonable countermeasures.

1. Problems in Jiangxi's Higher Education Internationalization

1.1 Laggard Ideas of Educational Internationalization

Lying in Middle China, Jiangxi people have little access to western ideas. Especially before reform and opening up, there was no sufficient attention and input to higher education and research and universities' internationalization wasn't attached importance to, not to mention being regarded as the strategy for universities' development.

It is not until the recent years that universities in Jiangxi began to list internationalization development as one part of their development strategies. Educational departments at all levels and universities of different types in Jiangxi now regard universities' internationalization development as the direction and goal of higher education development, actively promote and encourage participation in international education exchanges and cooperation and absorb advanced foreign educational thoughts and ideas. At present, however, both government and universities haven't found out effective methods to convert ideas into actions.

1.2 Low Level of Staff Internationalization

It is quite important to enroll teachers and send Chinese teachers abroad for training in order to improve the internationalization level of universities as well as to enlarge teachers' horizon. As is shown in a survey conducted in Washington State University in 1993, 90% respondents from 183 universities claim that teachers play a critical role in universities' internationalization. Those schools uninterested in internationalization affairs tend to be isolated from the orbit of internationalization. There are two major ways of improving teachers' international background in Jiangxi and even the whole country: Chinese teachers going abroad and inviting long and short-term experts (they generally have no academic background and serve in China from half a year to three years) to come to China. More specific analysis on the internationalization of universities in Jiangxi from the two perspectives is given as follows.

1.2.1 Slow Progress in Chinese Teachers' Exchanges Abroad

It has been long that universities in Jiangxi haven't attached enough importance to the teaching staff's long-term exchanges, hence lagging behind in staff training abroad, receiving and sending visiting scholars and so on. In spite of some progress in teachers' training abroad and exchanges currently, Jiangxi is still far behind those developed provinces in China.

In the aspect of government-sponsored overseas study, Jiangxi has achieved slow progress compared with other parts of China for a long term and only a quite small number of teachers have been sent to pursue their study for the doctor's degree, only ahead of Mongolia and Tibet.

1.2.2 Low Academic Level of Foreign Experts

Inviting foreign experts is an important form to introduce foreign intelligence, to learn advanced foreign science and technology as well as their advanced culture and an important way to enhance disciplinary development, to improve staff quality and their abilities in research as well as to cultivate high-level talents.

Regardless of the constantly increasing number and expanded channels of foreign experts invited by Jiangxi universities, these experts have low academic level and most of them are specialized in language, hence leading to the shortage of experts with higher academic level in science and engineering. In addition, there is a larger disparity between Jiangxi and those developed provinces in short-term experts although that in long-term experts is not so obvious.

1.3 Dissatisfying Enrollment of Overseas Students

An increasing number of overseas students is one of the obvious characteristics of higher education internationalization. According to Henry Rosovsky who used to be Director of School of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University for 11 years, a university tends to have broader educational idea and horizon as well as higher-level teaching and research with a considerable number of overseas students. Actually, many world-class universities emphasize the enrollment of overseas students, such as in Britain where the number of overseas students is regarded as an important index for a university's rank.

Student exchanges can be divided into two types: enrolling overseas students and sending Chinese students abroad, including sending exchange students according to relevant exchange plans, sending students for cooperative research according to cooperation plans and sending students for degrees.

In the recent years, China has received more overseas students from broader sources, including Jiangxi Province. However, when compared with those first-class universities in the world or in China or even some universities in Middle China, universities in Jiangxi still have some problems with their enrollment of overseas students.

1.3.1 Small Number and Proportion of Overseas Students

It was once suggested by BOVEY Committee in Canada that overseas students should take up 5% or above of the total number of students. Up to now, world-class universities have achieved or even surpassed this goal, where overseas students take up 5% to 24% of the total and overseas postgraduates have a general proportion of 20% which is even higher than that of undergraduates. Due to Jiangxi's geographical location and lagged economy and culture, its universities suffer from a small number and proportion of overseas students, far behind world-class universities, advanced universities in other provinces or even those of the provinces in Middle China.

1.3.2 Poor Quality and Unreasonable Structure of Overseas Students

Although it is of importance to regard the number of overseas students as a visible sign of higher education internationalization, their quality and structure seems more important. As structure determines function, a reasonable structure of overseas students will promote the development of different disciplines in a university in the direction of internationalization. It is a reflection of high degree of internationalization to have overseas student education with high quality as well as reasonable structure.

In spite of the gradually larger scale of overseas students and greater number of students for educational certificates in Jiangxi and other parts of China, there aren't a large number of overseas students to study for degrees, especially for the master's degree and the doctor's degree. Although there have been more overseas students in Jiangxi in the recent years, those specialized in language still take up 90% of the total.

1.4 Poor International Cooperation in Running Schools

Cooperation in running schools is an important way to have foreign exchanges and cooperation and therefore to realize higher education internationalization, an important part for higher education to achieve development in

the world and an important channel to introduce foreign capital, facilities and intelligence as well as to cultivate demanded talents or new talents. Currently, a lot of universities are having cooperative researches with foreign universities, institutions and companies in order to keep track of the trends of scientific and technological development in the world by inviting overseas students or sending Chinese students abroad; they are also establishing joint research and development centers or research funds, creating university techno parks to combine industry, education and research closely in order to change universities into bases for knowledge innovation, technological innovation and knowledge-oriented enterprises.

At present, Jiangxi's cooperative projects have stepped from the initial general training to secondary faculties and curricula education in flexible forms with its emphasis on non-curricula education and vocational training and coverage over language and staff training or even higher-level curricula education. In this way, their shortage of capital for running schools is solved and people's demands for education at different levels are fulfilled. However, their international cooperation still needs to be improved.

1.5 Small Scale of International Exchanges of Information

International conferences are an important aspect in academic exchanges. In recent years, more university teachers from Jiangxi have attended international conferences, hence promoting the contacts and exchanges between Jiangxi's higher education and foreign higher education. However, the amount of international or regional conferences held by Jiangxi universities is still insufficient compared with those advanced universities in China.

As a global trend of higher education development, internationalization is not only an educational ideal but an actual educational practice conducted all over the world. There are a variety of reasons for the problems facing Jiangxi's attempt in higher education internationalization, including both subjective reasons and objective ones such as poor economic development. It will take a long period to confirm the direction of Jiangxi's higher education internationalization and to put it into implementation in effective ways. In order to promote its development, relevant government departments and universities are expected to emancipate their minds and update their ideas, to establish corresponding countermeasures and therefore to promote higher education's development with effective measures in the all-round, all-level, wide-range and high-quality direction.

2. Countermeasures for Internationalization Development of Jiangxi's Higher Education

2.1 Enhancing Understanding, Updating Ideas and Accelerating Relevant Projects

The internationalization development of Jiangxi's higher education relies on people's understanding as well as economic factors. Due to the under-appreciation of the importance of higher education internationalization in Jiangxi, it is not regarded as a method to facilitate leap-forward economic development. Accordingly, there is no purposiveness, planning, organization for the whole development process, leading to inefficient use of funds and slow development in the direction of internationalization. So it is the internal request of higher education development as well as the actual demands of Jiangxi's economic development to update the outdated and traditional ideas and to establish the idea of educational internationalization.

2.2 Sorting out Relations and Perfecting Systems According to Actual Demands

The administrative systems of Jiangxi higher education have to be greatly reformed to conform to the demands of internationalization, through which relations can be sorted out, systems can be perfected and favorable internal and external environments can be created. As for the external environment, on one hand, relevant government departments are expected to further carry out and perfect universities' rights in running and managing schools independently, which is an objective request of higher education's development as well as a necessary request of creative talents' growth rules. A variety of examining and approving formalities relevant to international cooperation in running schools should be simplified to the greatest extent to fully exert universities' enthusiasm and flexibility in this field. On the other hand, the internationalization level of a university should be taken as an important index for its running quality and should be listed in the assessment system for general universities' teaching level. Meanwhile, a statistics and open system of the data on universities' internalization level should be established to publicize certain information to the society regularly and therefore to promote the internationalization development of universities.

As for the internal environment, universities' internal management system should also be reformed

The following problems need to get solved: first is to reform their personnel management system in order to give teachers' enough rights to deal with their own affairs as well as respects. Second, since only the exchange visits between the administrative staff are involved in the current international exchanges between universities, these universities are expected to improve their efficiency and seize opportunities to develop their international

exchanges to the academic level and to the teaching staff as the main body. Third, the international exchange department in universities should be converted from a businesslike department to a bank of ideas as well as a strategy planning department for international cooperation of the whole university. Therefore, it is an indispensable path as well as a necessary choice in order to improve school-running efficiency and cultivate high-quality talents to learn developed counties' experiences and to implement market-oriented operation and enterprise-style management.

2.3 Confirming Objectives, Giving Guidance According to Different Types and Developing Individuality

In international exchanges, importance should be attached to going out to the world as well as introducing excellent foreign resources in order to expand the enrollment of overseas students in China. The reality of a province and a university should be taken into consideration to explore ways for running schools abroad and to improve the internationalization level of Jiangxi's higher education with the guideline of "attracting more overseas students" and "going out to the world".

2.3.1 Promoting Sino-Foreign Cooperative School Running and Introducing Excellent Foreign Educational Resources

Two key points should be established in Sino-foreign cooperative school running: having high-level cooperative school running programs above masters to improve Jiangxi's school-running level and having cooperative programs in the vocational education field. In the latter aspect, some advanced ideas and school running systems fit for market should be learnt from Germany's dual system, Australia's TAFE and Europe and America's community college system to play the important role of the prosperity of Jiangxi's economy in Middle China.

2.3.2 Expanding the Scale of Overseas Students in China and Forming Education with Jiangxi's Characteristics

Great efforts should be made to expand the scale of overseas students in China, including making the affairs relevant to overseas studies in China as one part of Chinese universities' overall plan for future development as well as combing them with universities' overall construction and development as an important part in the process for them to go to the world, constantly reforming and perfecting systems relevant to overseas students' study and life and therefore improving relevant educational level and reflecting the characteristics of Jiangxi universities by taking advantage of Jiangxi's remarkable strengths in Chinese teaching, Hakka culture, pottery, traditional Chinese medicine to set specialties conforming to overseas students' characteristics.

2.3.3 Exploring Channels for Overseas School Running and Helping Jiangxi Universities to be known in the World

In order to create a new situation for Jiangxi's international exchanges and cooperation, Jiangxi plans to finish its relevant projects in 3 to 5 years. In addition, its focus will be shifted to form a work system with universities as the dominant role, departments as the main body and projects as the basis. In other words, we are aiming at forming a system of international exchanges and cooperation with virtuous cycle in which universities, departments and projects are connected with foreign units and projects and therefore forming a cubic layout for international exchanges and cooperation at multi levels, involving multi fields and in multi forms.

2.4 Improving Teaching Quality and Developing Courses

The internationalization of educational contents mainly refers to that of subject construction, specialty setting and course contents. That is to say, it can be achieved by setting new subjects relevant to international education, adding relevant specialties or relevant international knowledge in the existing courses. When conducting the internationalization of educational contents, first of all, courses should be divided into different types and different objectives for their international development should be laid down; second, courses should be treated in different ways according to their different levels. To sum up, the reality of different universities and areas as well as their actual school-running directions and cultivation objectives should be based on to lay down different requirements, objectives, contents, forms and measures for course internationalization accordingly.

2.5 Expanding Channels and Creating Conditions in Accordance with Local Conditions

International educational exchanges call for sufficient funds for their development. Those world-famous universities attract foreign scholars and overseas students with their sufficient capital, first-class basic researches and advanced technologies. Compared with them, Chinese universities are faced with insufficient funds, which cannot be solved in a short term. Located in inland China, Jiangxi can only earn quite limited financial assistance from the government, which is far from the demands for developing advanced universities. Therefore, we should turn to some effective ways instead of fully depending on the government: first, social capital should be guided to invest in running schools; second, a variety of methods should be employed to attract high-level talents to

come back to China; third, factors relevant to international exchanges should be taken into full consideration in the plan for educational development.

Only when the universities in Jiangxi fully realize the important role of higher education internationalization in the whole educational and economic development and put it on the agenda for school reform and development, change the outdated ideas of foreign affairs and really establish the perspective of developing education in accordance to the demands of the world will the school-running level of Jiangxi be greatly improved.

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