Being International: How Far Can We Go for Our Universities?

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Abstract. Being international is the only way for every university to go in the context of the new national “Double first-rate” plan. This paper outlines current status of our universities, lists and analyzes some of their shortcomings and consequences caused. Then some suggestions are presented to boost the internationalize of universities. For a university to be international, we have to (1) restore the function of a university as academic research, (2) form clear understanding of our own needs, (3) maintain the necessary awe of politics and (4) rebuild health relations between tutor and students. Only in this way can we achieve the internationalization of our universities in the future.

Current Status of Chinese Higher Education

After its founding in 1949, China has been isolated for such a long time until 1978. At that year, China opened its mind and was ready for friends from all around the globe. As the reflection of China’s economy development, universities are now more and more open and international. Visiting scholars, teachers, master candidates, Ph.D. students are sponsored to go abroad and learn from other universities and institutes. Just a few months ago, a project was initiated and a class of Chinese master candidates whose English are good and some international master candidates is formed. They are ready and will be addressed by professors from all around the world. As a member of the committee, I tried my best to search and invite professors who are available to teach specific courses for these master candidates. Before I sent the invitation letters, I was told that each course would last about one week. Then I stopped, didn’t know what to do now. Because in most universities, one week is far from enough for a core course. Giving lecture is one thing, understood and grasped by these master candidates is another thing. If such a method is ok, we don’t even bother to invite professors. All we need to do is search video clips from website such as YouTube, download these video clips and then show them to these master candidates. For the video clips and one-week lecture have something in common, they just ignore the feelings and ability of these master candidates. In 1936, famous writer Lu Xun once said, for foreign cultures, firstly, they should be brought in, and then be used after analyzing, i.e. they are neither refused nor accepted completely. If I was in charge of the international class, here was what I will do. After the courses and teaching objectives have been determined, invitation letters will be sent to professors asking for if they are available for the specific course. Once positive response is received, time is managed to accommodate the professor. Frequent contact should be made between the professor and me concerning the teaching plan, homework, assignment, et al. It’s the professor’s privilege to manage the course details. He just does what he has done in his own university. One or more Chinese teachers will accompany the professor and help to collect homework or assignments, and more importantly, learn from the professor. Once a course is finished, a questionnaire will be handed out asking both teachers and master candidates how they feel about the course, any suggestions or recommendations for the course or the professor. This information will be collected and analyzed to seek the possibility of improving the course by our own. And this is the right way for us to learn something from these distinguished professors. And this is exactly what Mr. Lu Xun recommended more than 80 years ago.

China now looks like a train running very fast towards communism. As a member on the train,
everyone is in a rush to do almost everything. We are in a rush to fly around the globe for sight-seeing and then take photos everywhere. We won’t hesitate to slow down and enjoy the scenery with our hearts. We buy Canada goose for one single reason, it’s a symbol of rich and we don’t have time to think it over whether we really need it in Beijing. We teach our kids how to write and calculate when they are just 4 or 5 years old for fear that our kids might fall behind when they are in primary school. And here in the university, we are in a hurry to invite professors and the key point lies in the word “invite”, whether the master candidates understand or not is not my concern. We are told not to look at the surface of things and now, however, we are doing exactly what we are told not to. Like father, like son. How about like teachers, like graduates?

My puzzle about the invitation of professors is just a reflection of current status of Chinese universities on their way to be international. Shi Yi-gong, a famous biophysicist in China, resigned his post as vice-president of Tsinghua University and founded West Lake University[1]. Why does he do that? Because he was shocked by several stories. First, one of his promising Ph.D. candidates told Mr. Shi that he would not continue his study in biology, he would switch to financial major for it paid well after his graduation. Job-oriented policy is flooded through Chinese universities and also among university graduates. The reason why I choose my major is not because I like it, but because it’s paid well after my graduation. University, is a place cultivating elites and leaders for the whole nation or even the whole world. Second, one should make use of what one has learnt, a famous Chinese old saying. During my stay in the university, I have learnt advanced mathematics, physics, English, computer science, et al. and now I work as a teacher, so can I say the courses above are all useless? There are countless possibilities in our future and no one can say that. There must be something wrong with the guiding ideology of Chinese universities. These two stories shocked Mr. Shi and pushed him to think deep about the reality of Chinese universities and founded West Lake University. It’s not possible for a university lacking of foresight to be fully international.

Here comes the question, how can Chinese universities become international[2]? Let’s look back at the international master class example. We want to be international, then we need to know what is international? How can we know that? We learn from these professors we invite from other universities. Stay low-profile and be a quite learner at class, learn the knowledge as well as the thought, the strategy with our heart. Keep frequent contact with professors. Only in this way can we understand the way they teach and form deep understanding of being international. A bunch of international students in the campus may not mean a university with international view. Only her graduates with an international vision can guarantee a university with international vision. What’s the purpose of a university? Innovation[3-4]. How can a university boost innovation? Perform fundamental research. Innovation will be idle with solid background on fundamental research or basic research. The aim of fundamental research is to provide scientific theories for improving the understanding of our nature, while applied research is to use theory to provide technique or technology to alter the out nature. On November 24, 2018, Science magazine published an article about how dandelion seed fly by riding the wind. A structure called pappus is attached to the dandelion seeds and this pappus creates a stable vortex above the seed to keep it float. This is what we call fundamental research. Another example of fundamental research is about a special nozzle. We see nozzles in our daily life and they usually take the shape of a taper profile. PAX scientific has developed a nozzle by learning from the profile of a lily (Figure 1). Take a close look of the nozzle, you can realize it has something in common with not only lily, but also a tornado. When a tornado is approaching, almost everything will be brought away by its destructive force. With the theory of streamlining principle, one single lily nozzle can mix as much as several thousand pounds of water without increasing power input. Such researches as lily nozzle and dandelion seed are rare in china for everyone is in a hurry to do something useful, no one cares or sees minor things like these above and this research cannot guarantee any benefit out of it. As a member of the society, no one can stay untouched by the blundering psychology of society. This explains why everyone is busy with his or her own things, and when they come home, they feel at loss and don’t know what they have done and what they should do next.
Suggestions for Universities to be International

 Restore a University’s Function as a Place of Academic Research

Therefore, for a university to be international, one priority is to restore its own function as a place to generate theories or even hypothesis. For every undergraduate in the university, he does not need to worry about his future job, for finding a job is not the function of university. He needs go to a training school or vocational school to get a decent job after his graduation. For an undergraduate or graduate who devotes himself to scientific research, a friendly environment is needed so that he can slow down his steps and keep his eyes on something he misses when he is in a hurry. Only in this way can we answer the famous question asked by Tsien Hsue-Shen in 2005, prime minister Wen Jia-bao paid a visit to Tsien Hsue-Shen and Tsien sighed and said, we have cultivated so many undergraduates and graduates, why there is not a single one that can be compared with these masters educated during the period of Republic of China? Why are our universities always unable to cultivate outstanding talents? Lack of soil for talent cultivation is the root cause of failing to be a master.

Knowing Our Real Needs

Second, for a university to be international, we need to form a clear understanding of our own needs. Sometimes, hot spots in other country may not mean a lot to us. Every nation has its own interest and need. Several decades ago, we stopped on the development of our own aerospace engineering and now we are forced to run after and gain share of the aerospace market. What a pity! Almost every PC or laptop in China is equipped with CPU from intel or AMD. Then why should we manage to develop Loongson by our own? As core element of computer science, CPU is also a symbol of comprehensive national strength. Basic research is a foundation of nation’s mutual interest and should never be left behind. Gionee and Huawei are major cellphone vendors in China, and now they have quite different status. Gionee is now in the midst of storms while Huawei is attacking the land around the world. The only reason for such a discrepancy is that Gionee lacks of its own independent intellectual property rights while Huawei developed its own technology from scratch several decades ago. No matter where we are, no matter if we are developing or developed, we must meet the needs of our nation first and we must work on our won. Import from other countries may partially solve our problems, but it will never solve them completely. Let’s recall what our forefathers have done at early stage of P. R. China. Kuomintang was defeated and forced to flee to Taiwan before the founding of P. R. China. As a newly-born republic, the ambient environment was not quite friendly at that time and there was limited ways for us to go to boost the
national economy. We had to work on our own to almost everything. The outstanding intellectuals of former Republic of China made due contributions to the development of P. R. China. Chinese scholars all around the world responded the call from motherland and came back to serve the country. As an distinguished professor of MIT, Tsien Hsue-Shen decided to return to China after he was detained for several years and then he was finally released in exchange for American pilots captured during Korean War\[5\]. After his return, he lead the nuclear weapon project which finally lead to the successful atomic bomb test and hydrogen bomb test. He was the founder of Chinese aerospace engineering and was elected a member of Chinese Academy of Science in 1957. With everyone, inside and outside of China, is involved in the development of new China, the gross domestic products rocketed during the first five-year period. Those forefathers passed away, and now what should we do to inherited their will and keep on?

**Keep an Eye on Politics**

Third, stay away from politics. Politics and university are different from each other and are on different ways. Excessive political participation may lead the university to deviate from academic pathroad\[6\]. The scholars had shown respect for politics from the beginning of the university. Now, the biggest challenge we are facing now is excessive political participation. Project 211 intended to raise the research level of universities and cultivate strategies for socio-economic development. Project 985 intended to promote the development and reputation of the Chinese higher education system by founding world-class universities in the 21st century. Project 111 is a project initiated by both Ministry of Education and State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs to establish innovation centers. The Ministry of Education intended to create 100 innovation centers. Every single university has to alter its guideline to accommodate the newly-released project. Every member of the university is now busy doing something to improve the possibility of entry of new project. Normal teaching and scientific research have to be interrupted and make way for the new project. Much of a member’s time is spent on affairs such as filling in the forms, answering the questionnaire. et al. an old Chinese saying can describe this phenomenon perfectly. Once upon a time during the warring states period, a man from Kingdom of Chu was about to learn the language used in the Kingdom of Qi. While he was practicing Qi language, a bunch of Chu people chattered around him and finally he couldn’t learn Qi language very well because of the interference around. The same reason is valid for universities. If a university spends too much time and energy on these political affairs, then she does not have enough time for teaching activities and scientific research\[7\].

**Rebuild Health Relationship Between Tutors and Students**

Four, rebuild the relationship between supervisors and graduates. 2018 had witnessed too many tragedies regrading abnormal supervisor-graduate relationship. Yang Bao-de\[8\], a Ph.D. student at Xi'an Jiaotong University, was found dead on December 26, 2017 in Xi'an Weihe. Yang committed suicide under the heavy burden from his supervisor. He was more a servant than a Ph.D. candidate. He had to take care of almost everything of his supervisor’s daily life, PPT editing, household cleaning, shopping, et al. his supervisor promised him to send him abroad but she failed to do so. Daily trivial matters took up most of his time and further slowed down his dissertation progress. Among the chaos of internal and external troubles, he chose to end his life by jumping into the Weihe River.

March 26th, 2018, Tao Chongyuan, a master candidate of Wuhan University of Technology, jumped from the top of his dormitory and killed himself in such an extreme way\[9\]. Later investigation showed that Tao was forced to call his supervisor Dad in order to please his supervisor. There were three burdens that finally beat him down, deferment, failure in applying for master degree from other university and Ph.D. application rejected by his supervisor.

Under current tutor system in most Chinese universities, the supervisor has absolute authority over the students. The scandals of supervisors squeezing students in terms of sex, economy and academics have come and gone. One tragedy after another pushed the tutor system into the voice of doubt. There’s no clear interface between the tutor and his students. The power of a tutor is magnified infinitely and he can determine when a student can graduate or whether he will pass his
defense or not. They cannot form an equivalence in the relationship of complete omnipotence. No radical change or reform between current morbid supervisor-graduate relationship, being international is just an empty slogan[10].

Conclusions

Being international is the only way for every university to go in the context of national “Double first-rate” plan. This paper outlines current status of our higher education system, lists some of its shortcomings and some suggestions are also presented. Conclusions can be drawn that, for a university to be international, we have to (1) restore the function of a university as academic research, (2) form clear understanding of our own needs, (3) maintain the necessary awe of politics and (4) rebuild health relations between tutor and students. Only in this way can we achieve the internationalization of our universities in the future.

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