

# *Research on Mechanism of Foreign Talent Introduction in China's First-Class Discipline Construction Universities*

Hanwen Zhang

Faculty of Education, Office of International Cooperation and Exchange  
Northeast Normal University  
Changchun, P. R. China

**Abstract**—In recent years, fierce talent competition on the worldwide labor market has prompted moves to heighten the awareness of foreign talent work in China. Especially under the current “double first-class initiative” context, it becomes a matter of particular urgency. In order to stimulate the endogenous motivation of universities and enhance the efficiency of talent work, 23 first-class discipline construction universities are chosen as the research sample in this paper. Moreover, the mechanism of foreign talent introduction within these universities is explored as a significant means to achieve original targets. Through literature review, questionnaire survey and international comparison, it is concluded that under the premise of scientific strategic planning, these selected universities should establish a fully functional matrix organization mechanism, a comprehensive supporting service mechanism as well as a sound judgment and application mechanism for continuously enhancing academic research and personnel cultivation.

**Keywords**—mechanism; foreign talent; introduction

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of economic globalization and knowledge diplomacy, the internationalization of higher education has become an inevitable trend, among which foreign talents play an extremely crucial role. To respond to the challenges and opportunities of the time, Chinese General Secretary Xi Jinping attaches great importance to the role of foreign talents and a series of active policies are implemented accordingly. As the main front of foreign talent work, it is of great necessity for universities, especially first-class discipline construction universities to accelerate the pace of internal reform and improve the mechanism of foreign talent introduction for winning international competition and realizing academic prosperity.

## II. SAMPLE SELECTION AND VALUE EXAMINATION

### A. Concept Identification

On July 8, 1983, Comrade Deng Xiaoping delivered a vital speech named “Utilizing Foreign Talents and Expanding Opening to the Outside World”. The concept of “foreign talent introduction” was first proposed then. In this paper, foreign talent introduction in universities mainly refers to through inviting long-term or short-term foreign talents to teach courses, conduct scientific research, participate in international conferences, involve in administrative management and so on,

universities learn more about advanced educational concepts, cutting-edge scientific achievements and mature management models to make up for their own shortcomings in corresponding areas.

Mechanism is originally referred to as the structure and action principle of machine. [1] Its connotation in sociology can be expressed as “based on the existence of various parts, a specific operation mode of properly coordinating the relationship between various parts to better play the whole role.” With regard to foreign talent introduction, it involves three main links – introduction, retention, and application. Similarly, the whole mechanism of foreign talent introduction is made up of three components – introduction mechanism, service mechanism and management mechanism.

### B. Sample Selection of First-class Discipline Construction Universities

In October 2015, the State Council of China issued the “Overall Plan for Coordinating the Advancement of World First-Class Universities and World First-Class Disciplines”. Thus, the concept of “double first-class” is put forward. This initiative not only serves as the important deployment for China’s transition from “big education country” to “competitive education country”, but also is the core action of its strategy of “rejuvenating the country through science and education”. In September 2017, the list of first-class construction universities, first-class discipline construction universities and first-class construction disciplines was released, among which there were 42 first-class construction universities, 95 first-class discipline construction universities, and 465 first-class construction disciplines.

By comparing the list of first-class discipline construction universities and first-class construction disciplines, the quantity distribution of first-class construction disciplines within 95 first-class discipline construction universities is obtained. Considering that universities with only one first-class construction discipline have distinct professional characteristics and their competition pressure is relatively small, universities with two or more first-class construction disciplines are chosen as the research sample. These 23 selected first-class discipline construction universities are equipped with the solid foundation for foreign talent

introduction. Still, they have greater room for further improvement.

### *C. Value Examination of Foreign Talent Introduction in Universities under “Double First-class” Initiative*

According to “2019 Global Talent Competitiveness Index Report” released by Adecco, the world’s largest talent service company, China ranks 45th worldwide, dropping 2 in ranking compared with 2018. [2] This makes the construction of talent work quite crucial. From the perspective of university mission, “Opinions on Strengthening and Improving the Ideological and Political Work of Universities in the New Era” was issued in February 2017. It clearly stipulates that universities shoulder the great mission of talent cultivation, scientific research, social service, cultural heritage innovation, as well as international cooperation and exchange. Foreign talent introduction unites these five components precisely, for it functions as one form of international cooperation and exchange, and also helps to promote the completion of other four missions. In addition, talent introduction based on international vision is conducive to grasping the rule of talent flow. On one hand, disorderly flow of teachers and vicious competition among domestic universities can be alleviated. On the other hand, it acts as “accelerator” and “fast lane” for training innovative talents and strengthening scientific research.

As the process of “double first-class” initiative deepens, foreign talent introduction raises more eyebrows. The construction of first-class universities and first-class disciplines is centered on “Chinese characteristics and world high-level”. Therefore, learning advanced knowledge, experiences and management concepts from other countries is inevitable. In general, foreign talent introduction has provided valuable human resources and inexhaustible momentum for “double first-class” initiative. In turn, “double first-class” initiative has offered strong policy support and favorable ecological environment for the development of foreign talent introduction. These two complement each other and are indispensable.

## III. BARRIERS OF FOREIGN TALENT INTRODUCTION IN CHINA’S FIRST-CLASS DISCIPLINE CONSTRUCTION UNIVERSITIES

### *A. Top-Level Design Is Not Comprehensive.*

Orderly operation originates from scientific top-level design. At present, all first-class discipline construction universities have launched a series of activities to broaden international exchange, including convening worldwide conferences, setting up Confucius Institutes and signing specific cooperation agreements with foreign partners. By way of contrast, projects of foreign talent introduction are rarely mentioned in their strategic planning. In terms of university statistics shown on the homepage, various plans for domestic talent introduction are rich in type, and data of foreign students is accurate as well. However, the concrete information of foreign talents is not presented. It is revealing that the majority of first-class discipline construction universities have neglected the kinetic energy effect of foreign talents. They have no comprehensive planning for overall talent work, not to mention feasible promotion measures.

### *B. Organizational Structure Is Not Efficient.*

The whole procedure of foreign talent introduction is closely connected with the organizational leading group, the centralized management department, related coordination departments and specific implementation departments. Currently, different problems exist at all these four levels.

#### *1) Organizational Leading Group*

Among the selected first-class discipline construction universities, some of them have not yet established the leading group for foreign talent introduction. Some of them do have completed related organizational setting, but an effective negotiation and decision-making system has not been formed neither. All these exert a harmful influence on exercising original functions.

#### *2) Centralized Management Department*

In most first-class discipline construction universities, foreign talent work is carried out by the international cooperation and exchange department. However, their daily work mainly concentrates on the assistance of project application and implementation, the handling of long-term foreign talents’ work permit and short-term foreign talents’ invitation confirmation. Not much attention is paid to the introduction of foreign talents.

A new phenomenon to note is that in recent years, some of these universities begin to set up specific talent work offices for the recruitment of highly skilled talents, which are subordinate to human resources department. However, they tend to devote more efforts on domestic talents. In either case, there is no clear answer to the following key questions: who is the centralized management department, and what are its specific functions?

#### *3) Related Coordination Departments*

As mentioned above, foreign talent introduction is a systematic chain involving introduction, retention and application. Therefore, human resources department, academic affairs department, scientific research department and so on all serve as irreplaceable components for long-term development. How to achieve effective coordination among these different departments is another urgent problem that needs to be resolved properly.

#### *4) Specific Implementation Departments*

Specific implementation departments are colleges which foreign talents work for. In these first-class discipline construction universities, a common and distinct characteristic is that their actual promotion personnel usually have several different duties in one. They may also be responsible for sino-foreign collaborative running schools, international conference application or even teaching arrangement. Thus, it is difficult to complete the work of foreign talent introduction well.

### *C. Supporting Services Is Not Sufficient.*

Unlike other professions, the career of foreign talents in universities is an academic one. It is ultimately a “free spiritual production activity”, and this free spiritual production, such as scientific research, artistic creation, technological invention, theoretical innovation, etc., has great uncertainty and needs

institutional supporting services to guarantee a truly free production space. [3] Currently, subject to the pressure of various ranking indicators, these first-class discipline construction universities haven't formed the academic atmosphere of failure tolerance. What's worse, there are no relevant laws and regulations to protect the results of international collaborative research. Corresponding humanistic care is far from enough as well. These are all disadvantages that hinder the sustainable development of scientific research.

*D. Management System Is Not Sound.*

As to the management system for foreign talents, fair and concrete measures, including rewards and punishments count most. The establishment of an appropriate reward and punishment mechanism stems from scientific evaluation. At present, when talked of foreign talents, the trend for "materialization" is quite obvious. "Materialization" has two implications. First, the intrinsic endowment of human beings is transformed into the explicit characteristics of the products they produce. Second, the production exchange and distribution relationship among people appear as the attributes of objects. [4] Its specific manifestation is that explicit values which adapt to competition are overemphasized. That is, when evaluating foreign talents, the number and level of their academic achievements (such as papers, books, research reports, scientific research projects, etc.) are applied as the basic unit and also each level is assigned with a different weight or score. This has seriously affected fair evaluation and follow-up measures.

**IV. VIABLE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOREIGN TALENT INTRODUCTION IN CHINA'S FIRST-CLASS DISCIPLINE CONSTRUCTION UNIVERSITIES**

*A. Scientific Development Planning Is the Premise of Foreign Talent Introduction.*

*1) Set Clear Overall Goals.*

The goal of introducing foreign talents means its expected effects and other possible radiation effects. It is the logical starting point for intelligence introduction, and also determines related procedures, methods, service, as well as management. To establish clear overall goals, these first-class discipline construction universities should keep in mind that foreign talents introduction needs to be embedded in the institutional strategy. Former President of Stanford University, Frederick Emmons Terman, also known as "Father of Silicon Valley", proposed the principle of "steeple of excellence" around World War II, with the main intention to create advanced disciplines and attract high-quality students through introducing foreign talents. In addition, many universities in other countries also have different plans to build top-level universities, such as South Korea's "Intelligence Korea 21 Program", Japan's "21st Century COE Program", as well as Russia's "Federal Innovation University Program".

*2) Form Feasible Practical Path.*

Confronted with fierce competition, these first-class discipline construction universities should correctly identify their individual advantages and disadvantages. As a matter of fact, most of them are located in more developed areas within China (see Fig.1.). Therefore, when making promotion plans,

they could consider to center on strategic emerging industries around the country's priorities based on comparative strengths. One trap to avoid is that do not blindly follow the "peak" disciplines of similar universities and the "plateau" disciplines of high-level universities.

To be specific, universities and sub-colleges should work closely together. Sub-colleges set up their leading group for foreign talent introduction, and confirm development priorities in accordance with own discipline construction as well as curriculum reform. After bringing together the development plans of all sub-colleges, universities start to formulate detailed top-level design and properly handle the relationship among talent quantity, quality and structure from the macro perspective.

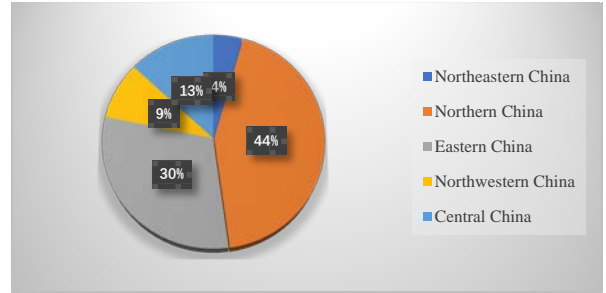


Fig. 1. Region distribution of first-class discipline construction universities

*B. Fully Functional Matrix Organization Mechanism Is the Engine for Foreign Talent Introduction.*

*1) Establish University-Level Vertical Management System.*

The vertical management system is to set up the leading group for foreign talent introduction in universities. The vice-president who is in charge of international cooperation and exchange department acts as the leader of the group. Other members include relevant personnel from human resources department, academic affairs department, scientific research department and so on. The responsibilities of the leading group include studying overall orientation, examining annual intelligence introduction plan, and evaluating implementation of key projects. Meanwhile, obligations of each department should be clarified in advance to ensure foreign talent work achieve "full coverage, no deletion and no duplication." Furthermore, it is better to construct an effective information sharing system for improving work efficiency.

*2) Establish Project-Level Horizontal Management System.*

The introduction of foreign talents at all these first-class discipline construction universities appears in the form of project. Thus, a project-level horizontal management system is essential to meet current needs. This system consists of project leaders and project team members. Each side has separate duties. More concretely, project leaders organize implementation plan, hire foreign talents, utilize project funds in accordance with the budget, draft evaluation papers, and report regularly to the university leading group. For project members, they work together to achieve one or more goals of the project. The composition of its members depends on needs of the project and available people to choose from.

*C. Comprehensive Supporting Service Mechanism Is the Guarantee for Foreign Talent Introduction.*

*1) Increase Policy Provision to Protect Research Results.*

A complete policy system for foreign talent introduction includes national laws, administrative regulations and other regulatory documents. For first-class discipline construction universities, the establishment of intellectual property identification system serves as the foundation. More attention should be paid to properly solving the problem concerning ownership of research results in collaborative projects. Besides, they can take advantage of their law disciplines to provide consulting services for foreign talents. This may also be an effective method to better protect legitimate rights.

*2) Optimize Relevant Environment To Motivate Better Working Performance.*

Excellent working performance emanates from motivation, rather than mandatory requirements. It is suggested that these first-class discipline construction universities actively create an ecological environment suitable for the survival and development of foreign talents. For instance, scientific research funds should be allocated in a timely manner. Complete software and hardware conditions should be provided for foreign talents to carry out work smoothly. It is also quite necessary to enhance humanistic care and strengthen platform construction, such as adopting bilingual forms for basic notices, and occasionally sending useful information on medical care, education or recreation.

*3) Provide Integrated Welfare Package To Relieve Possible Worries.*

As far as welfare is concerned, first-class discipline construction universities have many good examples to follow. University of British Columbia has set up "Teacher Housing Assistance Program". McGill University is equipped with "Spouse Employment Program". University of Alberta establishes extensive relationships with off-campus employers, conducts career-related lectures, and also provides resume guidance for foreign talents' spouses. California Institute of Technology and other partners jointly support International Spouse Club (CISC), and actively participate in International Dual Career Network (IDCN). [5] All these offer a stark reinforcement of considerate services at those world-class universities.

*D. Sound Judgment and Application Mechanism Is the Core for Foreign Talent Introduction.*

*1) Form Fair Talent Evaluation Procedures.*

During the process of evaluating foreign talents, first-class discipline construction universities should first develop different evaluation contents according to introduction targets. Foreign talents can be classified into three categories: teaching talents, research talents or both. Then a suitable evaluation model may be adopted as reference, which under most circumstances includes evaluation indicators, indicator annotations, indicator weights, indicator values and monitoring methods. Generally speaking, on one hand, there exists a basic evaluation of the workload they need to meet. On the other hand, the non-quantitative part is also involved to reflect the subjectivity of introduced talents. Meanwhile, peers and academic community are offered with a greater right to express

their opinions. With all these approaches, the scientific and democratic nature of evaluation is better retained.

*2) Adopt Flexible Talent Appointment Measures.*

It will be a beneficial attempt for first-class discipline construction universities to set up a small proportion of temporary positions. This is a common practice in many countries. The probationary period for instructors in the United States is 1 year, and only those who meet required conditions can be promoted. Newly recruited talents in UK universities are required to pass the trial period of more than 3 years. French assistants usually work as "informal teachers" for 2-3 years. [6] Associate professors must have probationary period. At the end of each probationary period, the university will review again and the qualified ones will be officially appointed by Minister of National Education. [7]

First-Class discipline construction universities could learn from these effective practices. That means both contractual employment system and tenure track system can be applied. This not only helps reduce the risk of universities' wrong decisions, but also offers foreign talents the possibility of working stably and conducting scientific research freely.

## V. CONCLUSION

The introduction of foreign talents is an indispensable part of the internationalization of higher education. It is not completely independent. On the contrary, it should be viewed in a holistic manner. Within the entire chain of foreign talent introduction, a complete mechanism consisting of organization mechanism, supporting service mechanism and judgment as well as application mechanism work together to guarantee the virtuous cycle of talent work.

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