

Internationalization of Higher Education with Chinese Characteristics:

A Model Based on Dialogue and Meaning Negotiation

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Abstract—Higher education plays a key role in the present and future of a nation, of which the development direction and the route choice are major issues. In the context of the coexistence of two phenomena, the trend of globalization and the resurgence of local protectionism, it is essential that the higher education sector break through the barriers of competing interests and find its way of development that is both in line with the historical trend and rooted in Chinese culture to achieve a balance between the assimilation of external resources and the export and share of its own advantages. The internationalization of higher education is in and of itself a process of cross-cultural dialogue which is the negotiation for shared meaning based on equality and mutual respect. In order to develop a higher education system with both Chinese characteristics and international elements, we must straighten out three relationships, namely between the government and institutions, between westernization and Chinese realities, and between the outward and inward flow of educational resources. A dialogue mechanism should be established to build a harmonious, long-term, and sustainable development model of the internationalization of higher education.

Keywords: *internationalization of higher education, dialogue, meaning negotiation, Chinese characteristics*

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern higher education in China (HEC) was born with an international gene which was inherited, continued to evolve and became an indispensable part. It learned from Japan in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republican period; a large number of intellectuals studied in Europe and the U.S. during the Republic of China period; it copied the Soviet model after the founding of new China; it witnessed large-scale foreign exchanges with the reform and opening-up; and now it is striving to comprehensively improve the quality and create top-class universities in the world. However, the process is far from straightforward. There have always been different demands, competing interests and thus conflicts. HEC has been swinging back and forth between two major camps, internationalization and localization. However, higher education plays a key role in the present and future of a nation, and is important in maintaining political stability, economic development, social well-being,

and cultural prosperity. Therefore, its development direction and the route choice are major issues worth great attention.

In today's rapidly changing international and domestic circumstances with the coexistence of two phenomena, globalization and the resurgence of local protectionism, it is essential that HEC break through the barriers of competing interests, and find a way which is both in line with the historical trend and rooted in China to achieve a balance between the assimilation of external resources and the export and share of its own advantages.

Being national is being international. The ultimate goal of the internationalization of higher education in China (IHEC) is not to annihilate the self, but to acquire the perspective of the other, to be critical, and to achieve distinctive features, so that it can contribute to and influence the world. With the enactment of "The National Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)" in 2010, "Some Opinions on The Opening-up of Education in The New Era" and "Promoting The 'One Belt and One Road' Educational Action" in 2016, the IHEC has been well oriented and directed by policy. It is to promote the quality of education by stepping up the opening-up of education sector to the world and strengthening quality assurance, to elevate the level of scientific research through cooperation with foreign institutions and researchers, to improve the foreign-related education, to develop innovative competence, to increase exchange of culture, to create a win-win outcome, and to enhance the cooperation between countries along "the Belt and Road" [1]. This shows that China attaches great importance to the internationalization of education and has set goals in various aspects and levels of planning. This process involves countries and governments, universities and institutions, enterprises, teachers and students, and other stakeholders, integrating traditional elements and modern high-tech. We endeavor to construct the "meaning" of the internationalization of education in the new era through multi-faceted dialogue and negotiation, and create a unique model with Chinese characteristics.

II. INTERCULTURALITY, DIALOGUE, AND MEANING NEGOTIATION

In the past two or three decades, internationalization has gradually become a mainstream of higher education, which aims to solve the common educational problems through international exchange and collaboration. With the background of global trade, education internationalization aims to train talents with international competitiveness, optimize the allocation of educational resources, and improve the quality of education and serve national interests. Internationalization of education is the process of integrating international or cross-cultural dimensions into teaching, research, and service functions [2], which means that international, cross-cultural, or global dimensions of education are integrated into the goals, functions or implementation of education [3]. That is, in addition to institutions, the government and education department also take part in internationalization which involves teaching, scientific research and social service functions. It works at both the macro and the micro levels. The internationalization of education is in and of itself a cultural phenomenon. Different cultural traditions interact with, influence, and draw lessons from each other, and understanding and integration can only be achieved through a positive and equal dialogue.

Culture is a way for people to feel, think and act. Through culture, they can form cognition of themselves and the world, expressing values in terms of race, morality, aesthetics, religion, and politics [4]. Interculturality is a concept proposed by German philosopher Habermas, and refers to the interactive process of the reorganization of meanings that occurs when different cultures meet [5]. Interculturality, based on the recognition of the differences between cultures and respect for the otherness, helps to build an internal relation with dialogue as the channel and understanding its goal. It provides a theoretical framework for clarifying the relationships between different cultures in a multicultural context, emphasizing that we must not only have our own cultural identity, but also integrate and interrelate with other cultures, so as to achieve coexistence. The 1992 UNESCO International Conference on Education recommended that intercultural education be designed as an education that respects, understands and enriches cultural diversity and contributes to world cultural development [6]. In a sense, the internationalization of education is the communication and exchange between different cultures in the field of education, for which the intercultural theory provides a new perspective and solution to problems.

Intercultural dialogue is a process of an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organizations with different cultural backgrounds or world views. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes [7]. In the context of globalization, dialogue and mutual understanding are the essentials for peace. Education should fit in with the global trend and train talents who are capable

of international understanding through dialogue and exchange with the world. Internationalization is essentially a dialogue between institutions and individuals from different countries and regions. Dialogue denotes that members of different groups have conflicting views and assumptions, and try to bridge the gap on the basis of acknowledging these differences. The more diverse the group's interests, the greater the cultural differences; and the more the hierarchies of rights, the lower the possibility of forming a common understanding [8]. In order to express our opinions and make them heard by others, in exchange, we should listen to the opinions of others. Dialogue between groups with the most divergent views is also the most difficult and challenging. Although dialogue does not necessarily require agreement, it is hoped that agreement in some certain areas can be reached. As a maker and disseminator of cultural products, higher education institutions have a mission with inherent cross-cultural attributes. The communication and exchange between institutions from different countries and regions, the global flow of teachers and students, and the redistribution of education resources all depend on the effectiveness and efficiency of cross-cultural dialogue.

If dialogue is the basis of internationalization, negotiation is the specific means and meaning construction is the ultimate goal of dialogue. The concept of negotiation is derived from the research in the field of second language acquisition, and refers to "the process of adjusting and modifying the dialogue between the two parties in order to overcome the obstacles to understanding encountered in communication"[9]. It needs to go through two stages: trigger-T and resolution-R, and the barrier removal includes three processes: indicator, response, and response to response [10]. Negotiations in the field of second language acquisition are conducted between individual, and the dialogue and negotiation in the process of internationalization of education goes beyond this level, and the background is more diverse, the level is higher, the elements are more complex, and the process is more difficult. Higher education in China has the characteristics of late start and rapid development, and because of its special political, economic, and socio-cultural background, there are differences in educational ideas, systems, and methods from the West or other countries, which has led to many difficulties and problems in internationalization. To remove these obstacles, it is necessary to form a clear awareness and expression of the differences, so that the two parties can adjust and modify the factors that cause the problems, and respond to and accept such adjustments and corrections. If both parties are well motivated, this process will continue iteratively until understanding or meaning is reached.

Meaning refers to the reason, role and value of the existence of something. Accordingly, the meaning of IHEC lies in the reason why it happens, the role it plays in China and the world, and the value it shows to all the parties involved in the process. Economic globalization and world integration have made its presence and development an inevitable process. Multi-level and wide-ranging educational exchanges and cooperation promote world peace. Economic

development, scientific and technological progress and cultural inheritance help to form a model of "international vision, Chinese road" proposed by Zhou Yuanqing, Vice Minister of Education of China, and make China's higher education an independent and indispensable part of the world higher education system. It benefits from and benefits the whole and the other because of its uniqueness and irreplaceable position.

III. THREE PAIRS OF RELATIONSHIPS AND NEGOTIATION AS A SOLUTION

In the process of the IHEC, there are several pairs of relationships that cannot be avoided or neglected. They are sometimes harmonious and sometimes opposed, and for this reason, the IHEC has a strong Chinese character. Negotiation is the premise of cooperation and development, and plays a central role in the construction of higher education model and meaning with Chinese characteristics. All stakeholders explore, express, and even compromise and co-construct to achieve the goal of internationalization.

A. *Bottom-up and top-down*

There are basically two types of driving force for internationalization: bottom-up and top-down. From top to bottom, the national government initiates, leads, regulates, and supervises the internationalization of education for the long-term economic and political objectives, formulates policies and even detailed rules, and comprehensively manages the running of educational institutions, while schools and individuals follow the national policy and handle international business in accordance with the government rule. The bottom-up path is the opposite: institutions and individuals are the main force in initiating internationalization; goal setting, implementation, and assessment are mainly performed by schools and individuals while the government provides policy support, funds and resources, and limited supervision based on the needs of institutions. Which one plays a leading role determines the direction of the internationalization model.

For historical reasons, Western universities have a deep-seated tradition of self-governance. Whether it is the French University of Paris where the idea of faculty governance originated, or the German University of Berlin of which the focus is on research, or the American Hopkins University which inherits German traditions, the institution enjoys great autonomy in both planning and operation. It chooses the development path and direction according to its own educational philosophy, goals and realities. The government only provides certain guidance and supervision in principle to coordinate, facilitate, and support. For example, in the "Bologna Process", the largest-scale internationalization of education in the West, the education departments of European countries only gave guidance in principle, and the universities and institutions have the final say in what and how to do through mutual consultation.

Although Chinese universities started in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China period, the main

structure and mode of today's higher education were formed mainly after the founding of New China. As a result, China's higher education has experienced three stages with a changing system of rights and responsibilities of the government and universities respectively: from 1949 to 1977, the stage of comprehensive government control and full affiliation of universities; from 1978 to 2009, the relaxation of government control and the expansion of university autonomy; from 2010 to the present, the combination of limited government regulation and university self-governance [11]. The relationship between the government and universities is also reflected in the entire process of the IHEC. Before the reform and opening up, universities as vassals of the government had almost no independence and autonomy. Their task was to implement government orders and resolutions. International exchanges were mainly conducted on a small scale with the former Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist countries. Although higher education in the first ten years after the founding of the People's Republic of China achieved some progress, it suffered great damage during the Cultural Revolution and university activities, including international exchanges, were completely suspended. Since the end of the 1970s, China began the reform and opening up, developing a market economy and transforming government functions. It gradually loosened the control over the higher education sector. The central government, local governments, and institutions jointly participated and shared their responsibilities. The three-tier management model was gradually formed, and the quantity and quality of higher education were greatly improved. The concept of internationalization began to attract people's attention. A large number of students and teachers went abroad to further their studies. International cooperation between schools was greatly strengthened. However, with the rapid development of economy, science and technology, and education, there was a surge of liberalism and rightism among teachers and students, likely to shake the foundation of the socialist regime. Therefore, after 2010, the central government has gradually tightened the control of the education sector, while in the meantime ensuring the institutions enjoy autonomy in some specific areas. In line with the national medium and long-term development plan and the Belt and Road Initiative, the government has increased financial support for universities to scale up internationalization and promote it to a new high. In summary, it can be concluded that the Chinese government has played the following roles in the process of internationalization of higher education: national strategy designer and program planner, major source of funds, executive director, and regulator and supervisor [12].

Both the top-down and bottom-up models have their advantages. In the bottom-up model, colleges and universities are more flexible in response to changes, which helps to maintain their own characteristics, while in the top-down model, institutions enjoy easier and quicker access to resources and work on specific measures and concrete indicators, which ensures the efficiency and the results of internationalization. As the two main participants of education internationalization, the government and

institutions negotiate rights and responsibilities on the basis of common goals, and co-build a unique model of internationalization. Due to China's political, social, historical and cultural origins, the government has always played an important role in education. This is the characteristic and advantage of China's higher education. It is all difficult for colleges and universities to reach the height and the government is much more efficient in policy making, resource allocation, and coordination and management. The top-down model enables institutions to share the benefits. Of course, this model may also cause problems such as over-control, fewer choices, and waste of resources. Therefore, in order for both to play an active role in IHEC particularly with institutions more involved in the process of decision-making, implementation and evaluation, the government and institutions need to conduct a dialogue and negotiate their responsibilities on an equal basis to arrive at better results.

B. Westernization and Chinese realities

Internationalization raises important questions about how higher education institutions are balancing between being "global" and traditional nation-building roles, including workforce development, citizenship formation, and knowledge production [13]. Some experts believe that internationalization is an overall process, in which higher education tends to be less of a country and more of an international development, and for other researchers Internationalization is defined as "a development trend in which higher education in various countries faces the world on a domestic basis" [14]. This shows that there is an international and local dispute in the internationalization of education itself. Correspondingly, in the process, CHE has been unable to avoid it and the real question that must be answered is whether internationalization is equivalent to westernization. Since CHE started late, it was inevitable to learn from other countries and benefit from their advantages in the beginning. This played a positive role in promoting its development, making it an integral part of world higher education. It also facilitated exchanges with higher education institutions from western countries.

However, China's higher education has always shown a kind of "humbleness" and or even "inferiority". When encountering resistance and problems in development, it is blamed for the backwardness of education itself and turns to the western countries for a solution which however took its form in a specific historical and cultural soil. The logic, context and background on which it relies are integrated, forming a development model with distinctive features, but this model is by no means universal and has its limitations. Even the forms of western higher education in different countries are diversified, and each has its own unique characteristics. Experience has also shown that CHE has indeed encountered many problems and challenges in the process of "westernization". The inadaptability of some western models in China is self-evident. For example, it turned out a failure to introduce and promote the University District System. China needs to understand the world, and the world also needs to understand China in history, at present, and in developing and forming.

With the rapid development of China's economy and the further improvement of overall national strength, China's voice has become more and more important on the international stage. Chinese culture, as one of the treasures of world culture, should be respected for its continuity and tenacity. China's tradition, development and history, and experience are equally worth sharing with the world. Education is not only the product of culture, but also the source of it. Its development is affected and restricted by culture, and it will inevitably play a role in cultural inheritance and development. While we vigorously promote the IHEC, we should also consciously focus on the localization or nationalization of higher education, that is, to establish a modern higher education system with Chinese characteristics that is compatible with our national conditions, or to establish a special system adapted to the characteristics of the Chinese nation [15]. Western culture, as a powerful culture, has extremely strong ability to assimilate other cultures. If the Chinese education industry is to develop arbitrarily in the process of internationalization, it will most likely lead to the loss of its national character or a malformed product that is neither Western nor Chinese. The due meaning or the mission of IHEC lies in the promotion of Chinese culture, the inheritance of Chinese characteristics, the enhancement of national self-confidence, and the building of Chinese identity. CHE should make the best of the advantages of culture, history, and tradition to fully reflect Chinese characteristics in educational philosophy and goals, curriculum systems, teaching methods, and scientific research directions, and continue to develop and improve Chinese literature, culture, philosophy, history, aesthetics, ethics, ancient and modern technology, and etc. that are both national and global.

The internationalization of education is the encounter, understanding and integration of multiple nations, cultures, systems, and characters. Its development model also shows a diversified trend. In any certain historical period, there is a specific choice of route: to abandon itself and become the other; or to be itself and reject the other; or to make it a new one by combining itself and the other. As the largest developing country with a clear self-awareness, China should create a brand of CHE on the way of internationalization, showing a clear attitude. In the dialogue with the world, CHE should take the initiative to build a system of discourse that can be understood by the world. Within the framework of equal negotiation, China, with a more open mind, can adopt different strategies of internationalization, such as assimilation, adaptation and inclusiveness, to absorb and integrate the advantages of other countries and carve out a new road that is both in line with the trend and distinctive of itself. Localization and internationalization of higher education are two sides of a coin. On one hand, localization or nationalization cannot replace internationalization and be used as an excuse for adhering to a backward system and rejecting advanced culture. On the other, internationalization cannot wipe out national characteristics and exclude localization. The boundary between the two should be negotiated in the process of internationalization to achieve a balanced development.

C. *Outward and inward*

The outward-oriented or inward-oriented type of higher education internationalization refers to the flow direction of educational resources, talents, experience, models, etc. Although "inward" and "outward" are completely opposite in the choice of direction, they are two aspects under the same goal. "Inward" indicates that the flow of educational resources into China is the result of Chinese higher education learning from abroad; "Outward" shows that China's educational resources are flowing to other countries, which is a manifestation of foreign higher education benefiting from China's advantages and characteristics.

China's higher education has a relatively shorter history, and it has been shifting from the mode which relies heavily on the inward flow to the one which combines the inward and the outward. Due to various reasons such as late start, weak basis and low quality, before 2010, China's higher education still adhered to the principle of "bringing in" in terms of knowledge, staff mobility, and cooperation. As for the flow of knowledge, great importance was attached to the translation and introduction of research achievements, curriculum materials, academic paradigms, and quality standards from developed countries; in personnel flow, we made great efforts to invite in overseas high-level talents through various plans and programs; in cooperation, the main focus was on learning management and talent-training experience [16]. During this period, a great number of Chinese students went to study abroad, and the direction was seemingly outward, but in essence it was an inward process for hopefully these students would come back and better serve the country with advanced scientific and cultural ideas and knowledge learned in foreign countries. Alongside this trend, the outward structure was set up in its initial form. In 2004, the first Confucius Institute was founded in Seoul, South Korea, and China's higher education took its step of "going out", promoting Chinese culture to the world and providing the foreign learners interested in Chinese culture and language with the most convenient channel and platform. These helped to enhance Sino-foreign friendship, prompted the development of multi-culture in the world, and played a positive role in improving the quality of higher education in China. However, with the rapid development of economy and increasing overall national strength, on one hand, the country's demand for scientific and technological personnel continues to increase, and on the other, the desire to expand China's international influence is becoming increasingly urgent. China's higher education can no longer stagnate in the model of "bringing in". It needs to further expand the channels of "going out" while "bringing in" and combine the two in a more effective way, opening up new paths for multi-dimensional functions of education. "Going out" is no longer a simple outflow of personnel or lower-level cooperation in teaching and scientific research, but a trend of continuous upgrading in terms of goals, scale, and level. In 2013, President Xi proposed the "Belt and Road Initiative", which laid a policy foundation and institutional guarantee for creating an "outward-oriented" international model of education. The Confucius Institute has been further developed, and its scale has been expanding in various parts

of the world. For the time being, the total number of Confucius Institutes has reached more than 500. It is now in a more convenient and advantageous position to promote Chinese language and culture abroad. Contact and cooperation build a bridge of communication. Chinese universities have been further expanding the admission of overseas students. According to the big data from the Ministry of Education, the number of overseas students studying in China in 2018 was close to 500,000, of which the self-financed students accounted for more than 87%, Asian students came close to 60% of the total, and African students came second.

While going global, Chinese higher education institutions have not closed down or contracted the channel of "bringing in", but have pushed it to a higher level. In 2008, the Central Government launched the "Thousand Talents Plan", which aims to attract high-level overseas talents. It is based on both the national development strategy and the local needs. It plans, targets and vigorously brings in high-end talents needed for scientific research innovations to enhance research competitiveness. By 2017, universities, scientific research institutions, and business units have gained more than 7,000 high-level talents through the "Thousand Talents Plan", forming a strong scientific research synergy.

In today's world, major higher education powers such as Europe and the U.S. play a dominant role and firmly control the industry chain. They export educational resources, seize the global market, recruit international students, and conduct international teacher training [17]. China's higher education should stand at a new height, take the new opportunities of development, and find a balance between "inward" and "outward". The introduction of high-quality educational resources still plays a very important role in China's development. It is also necessary to strengthen national and cultural self-confidence and export the resources with Chinese characteristics. In addition to the scale and quantity of entry and exit, China's higher education needs to further improve its quality and diversity. Especially in terms of "going out", high-level joint education (mutual recognition of credits and academic qualifications, distance education, etc.), independent education (the establishment of overseas campuses, etc.), scientific research cooperation (inter-school, team, individual cooperation; research, projects, etc.), service cooperation (political, economic, international affairs, etc.) should be fully boosted. In this process, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between the two directions, to form a positive dialogue, and to develop a virtuous circulation of educational resources.

IV. CONCLUSION

Meaning construction can be interpreted as the understanding of a situation, background, or concept through the association between existing knowledge and previous experience, which is both a personal and an organizational behavior. The internationalization of higher education is essentially a process of cross-cultural dialogue. It is based on equality and mutual respect among the participants of internationalization (government, institutions, individuals,

etc.), with the goal of building a meaning that can be understood by all. Dialogue and negotiation between cultures build organic connections between local socio-cultural realities and international elements, reaching a common understanding and meaning through co-construction.

The connotation of the internationalization model of higher education in China lies in Chinese characteristics, and its denotation is the common rules of internationalization. In order for China to develop a higher education system with both Chinese characteristics and international features, it must resolve and straighten out three contradictory relationships; a positive dialogue mechanism and consensus should be built between the government and institutions, between China and foreign countries, and between "bringing in" and "going out" to develop and promote the advantages of China's higher education, and to introduce, accept and assimilate resources from abroad. Contradictions and conflicts possibly caused by cultural differences should be handled properly to construct a harmonious, long-term, and sustainable internationalization model and make itself an indispensable part of the system of shared meaning.

This study discusses how to build a model of IHEC within the framework of intercultural dialogue and meaning negotiation. Three pairs of relationships are explored and explicated. It is hoped that this will help to provide a new perspective and further the research in this aspect.

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