

Exploration on the Professional Development of Undergraduate International Chinese Education in the Context of Pilot Free Trade Zone Construction Taking Heihe University as an Example

Bing Liu^{1,*}, Chunyan Lang¹

¹Heihe University, Heihe, Heilongjiang 164300, China

* Corresponding author. Email: bingliu03@126.com

ABSTRACT

Teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages with language and culture as center in local universities and colleges has encountered bottleneck in professional development. The general education model is questioned and challenged. Taking teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages in Heihe University as research object, this paper discovers such prominent issues as improper professional positioning, generalization of professional connotation and failure of professional practice with the help of field investigation, information comparison and analysis. Based on the construction of Heilongjiang pilot free trade zone and the talent demand of regional integration between China and Russia, the interdisciplinary, localized and customized joint training of "Chinese plus vocational education" and "Chinese plus regional culture" should be followed combined with high-quality unique resources. The stratification and heterogenization of international Chinese education serve as an effective way to promote the spread of Chinese language and culture.

Keywords: international Chinese education, local colleges and universities, development dilemma, professionalization, regional culture

I. INTRODUCTION

On August 2, 2019, the State Council released the overall plan for the establishment of 6 new pilot free trade zones, among which *Overall Plan of China (Heilongjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone* elevated Heihe one of the three zones in the construction of pilot free trade zone. On September 17, 2019, Heihe District of China (Heilongjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone was established, marking the start of the construction of northernmost free trade zone in China. The undertaking imposed to Heihe by the new national economic development strategy benefits from its superior geography and culture, which also reflects future prospect and determination of deep cross-border cooperation between China and Russia. This is also manifested in the functional partitioning of the Heihe pilot free trade zone. Heihe should focus on the development of cross-border energy and resources comprehensive processing and utilization, green food,

trade and logistics, tourism, health, border finance and other industries, build itself into a cross-border industrial agglomeration area, a demonstration area for cooperation between border cities, a border port logistics hub, and an important base for China-Russia exchanges and cooperation. [1] As early as 2018, President Xi Jinping delivered a speech entitled "Sharing New Opportunities for the Development of the Far East and Creating a Better Future for Northeast Asia" at the fourth Plenary Session of the Eastern Economic Forum held in Russia, taking the coordinated development of regional integration between China and Russia as the only way to common prosperity of Northeast Asia. As a prerequisite for economic hike, the internationalization of Chinese language and culture with the strategic goal of "going global" has given full play to its role in building trans-regional, trans-ethnic, trans-cultural and even trans-cultural relations of mutual trust, serving as a powerful cornerstone for maintaining regional peace and stability. The popularity of international Chinese education in Chinese colleges and universities is a direct response to such social demand and an impetus for China to step onto the global stage. Heihe College is the only local undergraduate college on the far eastern border between

*Fund: Heilongjiang province education and teaching reform project "Innovative Research on Improving Practical Ability of Undergraduates Majoring in Chinese International Education from the Perspective of 'the Belt and Road'". (Project No.: SJGY20190460)

China and Russia, standing at the forefront of opening up to Russia. Therefore, the training of international Chinese education professionals must stay current with local prospect planning and even the medium-and-long-term cross-border cooperation strategies between China and Russia at the national level. Therefore, the authors probe into the necessity and channels of the transformation and upgrading of undergraduate international Chinese education in Heihe University, which is also the main proposition discussed in this paper.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT DILEMMA OF UNDERGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL CHINESE EDUCATION

The undergraduate international Chinese education of Heihe University is one of the pioneers in the upsurge of international communication of Chinese language and culture (first enrollment in 2011). The 9-year construction and development proves its exploration experience and various reforms. But few Chinese teachers for foreigners have been trained. The authors mentioned in another paper that few students from Heihe University are still pursuing further education in this major or engaging in international promotion of Chinese (including working in Chinese training institutions and Hanban-sponsored volunteers) after graduation. [2] In recent years, despite taking students' practical value judgment and choice towards career as focus, the orientation and connotation construction of international Chinese education has been similar and stereotyped, which prompts a vicious circle. However, the contradiction between talent supply and demand, educational expectation and result, and subject and object of educational behavior can be complicated and diverse.

A. It is difficult to maintain the professional construction with the connotation of "general knowledge"

In 2012, *Undergraduate Program Catalog and Program Description of Chinese Colleges and Universities* released by Ministry of Education proposes that international Chinese education aims to "cultivate professional personnel involving Chinese language and literature with solid basic knowledge of Chinese, humanistic quality, professional knowledge and ability in Chinese literature, Chinese culture, cross-cultural communication, etc. They should be capable of teaching Chinese in all kinds of schools inside and outside China, and engaging in work related to language and culture communication in various functional departments, foreign trade organizations, press and publication units, enterprises and institutions." [3] In China, teachers teaching Chinese to the speakers of other language are positioned as

"professional personnel", which is more rooted in the macro perspective of the ultimate goal of international communication of Chinese language and culture. Many practices on talent training reveal that "general education" applicable to multi-culture and multi-industry is the only way. Professional personnel are responsible for guiding generalists, who will be trained to professional personnel, which mirrors the high expectation for universities and students pursuing further studies.

Heihe University is an application-oriented local undergraduate university dedicated to make cultural exchanges and cooperation between China and Russia its feature. The undergraduate international Chinese education it offers not only adheres to national-level mission, but also emphasizes guidance of sending international Chinese teachers to Russia in terms of teaching resource input, talent training program, and teaching staff construction. The construction of the whole teaching system focuses on the teaching of Russian language and culture, the cultivation of students' intercultural communication and the development of practice activities in Russia. The comparison between effect and original intention shows that the simple superposition of both national and school requirements cannot realize the utmost effect combining pertinence, integration and practicability. The real reason lies in unclear self-cognition, inaccurate self-positioning, and failure to realize the local transformation of national overall educational concept, and to find a way of innovation.

Heihe University is relatively weak in general talent training of international Chinese education, which is true even in Heilongjiang Province. The newly-built undergraduate universities enjoy limited scale, shallow cultural deposits, poor teaching accumulation and relatively deficient in resources. The persistence of "undergraduate orientation" will inevitably make international Chinese education exist in name only. Therefore, instead of struggling to explore the trend of "generalist" cultivation, people should change tack: serve the local economy and regional market demand, and open up a new world for the cultivation of "professionals". The dual core mode of "Chinese plus professional skills" should replace the basic routine of "Chinese plus culture" to promote the undergraduate international Chinese education in Heihe College to vocational education. Instead of looking at the external environment (domestic and international environment) and making efforts to improve the universality of students, it is better to focus on the internal small environment (local and regional environment) and elaborate ways to retain talents that in return boost local economy, society and culture.

B. It is difficult to build professional practice teaching system and practice base

Standards for Teachers of Chinese to Speakers of Other Language released by Hanban fully reflects the emphasis on the practical ability of international Chinese teachers, and makes the specific requirements for "application-oriented professionals" more explicit and detailed. Since its establishment, the undergraduate international Chinese education in Heihe University has been confronted with such problems as divorce of theory from practice, single form of practice and imperfect evaluation of practice.

First, as to institution, international Chinese education is affiliated to School of Humanities and Media, and is directly managed by Department of Chinese Language and Literature. However, education of foreign students and short-term exchange and training programs are subject to School of International Education, which mainly carry out Chinese language and Chinese culture teaching. Foreign students enjoy no access to engage in certain major. As a result, the on-campus practice activities of students majoring in international Chinese education require close cooperation and coordination between the two schools, as well as overall consideration and resource sharing in the aspects of teaching planning, curriculum arrangement, teacher connection, student management, etc., which is arduous in reality. The one-week teaching observation and the graduation field work of a small number of students in the School of International Education cannot fundamentally solve the problem of "insufficient food" and "unbalanced nutrition" in practice. In addition, the curriculum design shows that knowledge learning aiming at "general knowledge" training is obviously superior to ability training. Most teachers, though devoted to classroom teaching, lack overall planning for in-class practice and extra-curricular activities. The pertinence, relevance and hierarchy are not obvious in and out of class, and the importance of exploitation and utilization of network resources and local cultural resources has not yet fully realized. The emphasis on objective conditions cannot make any difference. As to internship and practice platform, international Chinese education in Heihe College enjoys no special training room (such as micro-classroom and cultural situation experience room) and stable off-campus internship base, let alone communication and cooperation with other colleges and relevant industrial units. Although there exists a joint Confucius Institute in Blagoveshchensk, Russia, whose utilization rate is poor, students fail to achieve role transformation and connotation enhancement in the professional atmosphere, which cripples their performance. Finally, the practical teaching results and feedback show that awareness of unified resource database construction is not formed. The personal files of teachers and students have not been set up, let alone

persistent collection, sorting and research of data, achievements and cases, which would otherwise help to reflect on teaching and promote scientific research. In addition, the evaluation criteria and evaluation behaviors are unreasonable, imperfect, not paid attention to and implemented, which involves both teachers and students. Scientificity cannot be guaranteed with the target, process and result of practice not being quantified, which fundamentally challenges and even denies the value of practice.

C. Switching major based on trends in employment is a temporary relief

In 2018, School of Humanities and Media of Heihe University comprehensively revised the *Talent Training Program* for international Chinese education, and proposed new measures that allows sophomore to choose major again. This is a pilot reform based on the grim employment situation and the past employment reality. The original orientation of international Chinese teacher training has been retained, and the orientation of Chinese education has been added, aiming to promote the transformation of willing students into primary and secondary Chinese teachers, which is a common approach adopted by local colleges and universities. In the long run, such move weakens the professional connotation. The increasing generalization of theory and practice deprives some students of qualities and skills required by international Chinese teacher standard. Moreover, no expected results were obtained. In view of the complex student pool (international Chinese education in Heihe university enroll both students on the liberal-arts track and students following the science track. Numerous college dispensed students are also covered), the professional development cognition under this model is also challenged. Therefore, such model is only successfully applied to the class of 2019, not the class of 2018. On the one hand, college dispensed students mostly lack interest and motivation in learning, which is true of Chinese Language and Literature covering international Chinese education. They are more inclined to engage in ideal major through the postgraduate entrance examination, and do not care about other things. On the other hand, in terms of curriculum setting, pedagogical course and foreign language courses constitute the two core modules of curriculum system of international Chinese education. Compared with Chinese education, which includes a large number of literature courses, students guided by instrumental theory are prone to take cost-effectiveness as standard, thus discarding "useless" literature.

The original intention of the reform is that the professional competitiveness of students who choose Chinese education among primary and secondary teachers will not be significantly higher than that of students who choose Chinese international education.

The former is in a weak position in terms of academic promotion. After all, the major of international Chinese education is different from that of normal education. Considering the future professional certification, the former will not transform into normal education, which leads to the trying situation: poor juggle of both curriculum systems, ambiguous training objectives, unspecialized students and teachers, and immature professional knowledge of Chinese international education. Meanwhile, major transfer with an ambiguous future results to incoherent construction of teaching resources and unsatisfactory development of professional teachers. Therefore, rather than blindly expanding the professional margin, it is better to tap into professional, absorb local resources, create construction of international Chinese education with unique features, and find a way out and seek development based on the cultivation of international Chinese teachers.

III. COUNTERMEASURES TO PROMOTE THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL CHINESE EDUCATION

"Professional" boasts two meanings. First, based on the industry and market demand, the connection between training of international Chinese teachers and social talent needs is strengthened to create a channel for overseas professionals to enter China or for Chinese enterprises stationed overseas to accelerate the localization of employees. Second, skill training is highlighted and integrated with the international vision of vocational education. Practicality, application and operability are elevated as priority for professional development of undergraduate international Chinese education.

A. Innovating joint training mode and transforming to on-demand personnel training

Overall Plan of China (Heilongjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone states the reliance on the comprehensive processing and utilization of cross-border energy and resources, green food, trade and logistics, tourism, health, border finance and others for future prospect, which indicates that professional agglomeration both in China and Russia will be greatly enhanced with the formation of scale regional industry. The undergraduate international Chinese education in Heihe University should strengthen cooperation with foreign-related enterprises, and provide them with graduates boasting both second language teaching ability and professional quality, which will help them to speed up understanding and integrating into local culture in language and culture training of overseas talents. "Culture" here refers not only to traditional Chinese culture, but more importantly to corporate culture and industry culture, so

as to reduce the information asymmetry caused by differences in language and knowledge background, and effectively promote the formation of a circular economy in which local governments, enterprises, universities and students benefit. As a result, a cross-departmental and cross-disciplinary teaching system involving international Chinese education, School of Economic and Management, School of Computer and Information Engineering, School of Culture and Tourism, and School of Science is urgently needed, which facilitate students' acquisition of professional knowledge and skills through "Chinese plus" teaching program. At present, this is related to the optimal matching of professional Chinese teachers and vocational skill teachers. However, it forces professional Chinese teachers to improve their quality and ability from a longer and more ideal perspective. In other words, international Chinese teachers are pushed from single discipline background to fusion discipline one, the "language-first" or "culture-first" views are obsoleted, and "professional-first" concept is employed to cultivate competitiveness of international Chinese education in local colleges and universities, in a bid to promote the stratified and heterogeneous development of international Chinese education.

B. Adhering to the targeted, durative and evaluative practical teaching and following integrated development

The undergraduate international Chinese education in Heihe University centers on the cultivation of students' practical ability, and follows the three features: targetability, sustainability and evaluation. Targetability refers to the accurate positioning of practical teaching. In line with the principle of serving the construction of free trade zone, the principal position of students are highlighted, and quantifiable subdivision index are employed to implement vocational ability evaluation. The five abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating with industrial pertinence should be rationally arranged. The principle of unification and division should be followed when designing various practical activities. For example, language learning partner for foreign students, "Chinese plus" the second classroom, cross-border online Chinese teaching practice, simulation teaching, competition to promote learning, enterprise tour, cultural inspection, etc.. All these activities are dedicated to transforming diverse requirements into three-dimensional, multi-level and extensible system, thus improving the comprehensive quality of students through partial construction and development. Sustainability means that students' practice should not be "whim", but should penetrate the whole undergraduate study. The principle of coherence and gradual progress should be followed, and in-class and extracurricular activities, online and offline activities, school and industry, inside and outside China

should be integrated, achieving training objectives in the process of mid-term and short-term internship, social practice in winter and summer vacations and graduation practice. In this way, the self-positioning and self-shaping of students can be completed. Evaluation reflects two-way communication between teachers and students. The establishment of teacher evaluation standards depends on the practical effect of students to a certain extent, and students' self-competence is greatly influenced by teacher's evaluation and feedback. As a result, only by establishing a complete objective evaluation system, process evaluation system and effect evaluation system, adhering to unified and transparent evaluation standards, timely evaluation behaviors and authentic evaluation results, can essential problems be found in quantitative accumulation and research, and international Chinese education be freed from blindly following the trend.

C. Integrating local characteristic culture and nourishing international Chinese education with culture

In addition to language teaching, international Chinese education spreads Chinese values, corrects Chinese thought, Chinese spirit, Chinese attitude, Chinese stance, Chinese emotion and Chinese idea, thus realizing the fundamental purpose of cultural empathy and cultural integration. Regional culture and national culture are the best proof of the diversity of Chinese culture. It is of great practical significance and practical value to integrate local characteristic culture into teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

Heihe shares Longjiang regional culture with unique and diverse natural geography. The dense virgin forests of the Lesser Khingan Mountains, the spectacular natural volcanoes of five connected lakes, the vast snow fields, and the green organic agricultural products attract tourists from across China. The natural beauty of Heihe helps Russian students to break the emotional barrier and improve their initiative to integrate into social life. Heihe also boasts rich cultural resources of ethnic minorities, including the delicate birch bark crafts of the Oroqen minority, ancient rap art "Mosukun", traditional local-style Xie Ren Zhu building, mysterious Shaman belief, etc. Profound historical and cultural resources are also covered, such as history of the river basin bordering China and Russia, history of northeast anti-Japanese war, history of overseas Chinese in Russia and contemporary educated youth culture, etc. The field investigation and cultural experience of Russian students can not only transform abstract theoretical teaching into concrete images, stimulate their interest in learning, but also help them better grasp Chinese culture in the sharp contrast of culture. The vivid and dynamic culture are the most direct reflection of turbulent times. Compared with the "Great Wall", "Peking Opera", "Chinese martial arts"

and other known-to-all cultural symbols, students can truly feel that these cultures are growing synchronously with the economy and society, completely immersing themselves in all aspects of local production and life. In turn, this is conducive to improving the reputation of Heihe, promoting Longjiang regional culture, and driving the overall development of Heihe area of Heilongjiang pilot free trade zone based on culture.

IV. CONCLUSION

The local development of Heihe has entered a new chapter, and international Chinese education in Heihe University has encountered crossroads of transformation and upgrading. Better development pattern emphasizes international vision, reiterates local position, so as to enhance mutual communication and innovation.

References

- [1] Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. Overall plan of China (Heilongjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone [DB/OL]. (in Chinese)
http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2019-08/26/content_5424522.htm, 2019-8 -26.
- [2] Liu Bing. A Study on the Reform of the Undergraduate Curriculum System of Chinese International Education from the Perspective of Sino-Russian Cooperation — Taking Heihe University as an Example [J]. Journal of Kaifeng Institute of Education. 2019(2). (in Chinese)
- [3] Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. Undergraduate Program Catalog and Program Description of Chinese Colleges and Universities [M]. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2012. (in Chinese)
- [4] Hu Yuanxin. Analysis of the problems and challenges faced by Chinese international education under the background of the internationalization of vocational education [J]. Industry and Information Technology Education. 2020(7). (in Chinese)
- [5] Xu Yingchun. The Practice and Consideration of the Integration of Anhui Regional Culture into International Chinese Education [J]. Journal of Anhui Radio & TV University. 2019(4). (in Chinese)
- [6] Dai Ying. Exploration on the Training Mode of Practical Ability for TCSOL: A Case Study of Leshan Normal University [J]. Journal of Mianyang Teachers' College. 2020(4). (in Chinese)