

Research on MTCSOL Cultivation Mode at Normal Universities in Underdeveloped Inland Regions*

A Case of Jiangxi Normal University

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Abstract—Jiangxi Normal University has come up against some problems such as unreasonable curriculum provision, insufficient internship location and duration, unsatisfactory thesis quality and lagged teaching staff construction in the process of cultivating MTCSOL. As a result, specific measures need to be adopted to optimize the cultivation mode such as designing the curriculum not only oriented towards career requirement but beneficial to students' sustainable development, building a staged, multi-channel practical teaching model, setting up an all-round graduation thesis guiding and monitoring system, and speeding up teaching staff construction. This study has a certain reference value to the reform and innovation of the cultivation mode of MTCSOL at normal universities in the underdeveloped inland regions.

Keywords—underdeveloped inland region; normal university; MTCSOL; cultivation mode; reform

I. INTRODUCTION

Some economically developed big cities (such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou) or frontier areas bordering on foreign countries (such as Guangxi, Yunnan and Xinjiang, etc.) are places where overseas students are relatively concentrated. In addition, some colleges of science and engineering, medical colleges or comprehensive universities that offer characteristic technological specialties also appeal to overseas students. In the general background of international promotion of Chinese, the normal universities deep in the underdeveloped inland regions have offered such traditional predominant disciplines as Chinese, foreign languages and mathematics, etc., but it is always hard for them to expand the international student recruitment due to the lack of advantages in economy, geographical location and technological specialties, so that teaching Chinese as a foreign language could only start relatively late at universities of this kind, which has then produced an impact on the cultivation quality of Masters of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (MTCSOL for short). Based upon a case study of Jiangxi Normal University, this paper

This paper is the result of *Research on the Enhancement of the Overseas Teaching Ability of MTCSOL at Normal Universities in the Inland Regions*, a graduate teaching reform project of Jiangxi Normal University in 2013, and *Research on the Cultivation Mode of MTCSOL in Jiangxi Normal University*, a youth fund program in 2014.

carries out a discussion on the issue of how the normal universities in the underdeveloped inland regions should make effective use of their own advantages to overcome the adverse effects, and integrate various resources to reform and innovate the cultivation mode of MTCSOL.

II. MTCSOL AT JIANGXI NORMAL UNIVERSITY

The program for Masters of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (MTCSOL) was set up with the approval of the Academic Degree Office of the State Council in 2007, and it was in 2009 that Jiangxi Normal University was approved as a cultivation institution for MTCSOL. The university began to recruit overseas graduate students in the spring of 2010, and domestic graduate students in autumn the same year. The overseas students were mainly from Madagascar and Indonesia, and partly from South Korea, Japan, Russia and Ghana, etc. Before admission, these students had received a four-year undergraduate education of Chinese at universities in China or learned Chinese for two to four years at the Confucius Institute in their own country, and they were generally required to pass HSK Level Five when entering the university. The domestic students mainly majored in Chinese Linguistics and Literature, TCSL (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language) and English, while very few majored in finance and economics. Most of them are fresh graduates and they rarely associated with overseas students before admission. Moreover, they have little experience in teaching Chinese as a second language (including one-on-one tutoring).

III. MAJOR PROBLEMS IN EXISTING CULTIVATION MODE

The cultivation objectives of MTCSOL are to produce applicational, interdisciplinary, internationalized special talents of high level that are proficient in teaching Chinese as a second language. Besides, they must have great skills in disseminating Chinese culture and cross-cultural communication. What's more, they should have capabilities of promoting Chinese internationally, and qualify themselves for many teaching tasks. From a macroscopic perspective,

whether the cultivation objectives can be achieved or not has a lot to do with the students, the curriculum provision and practical teaching, but at present, there are also the following issues in the cultivation mode adopted by Jiangxi Normal University for MTC SOL.

A. Unreasonable Curriculum Provision

Jiangxi Normal University set up courses for MTC SOL according to A Guiding Training Program for the Full-time Overseas Masters of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages and A Guiding Training Program for the Masters of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages made by the National Educational Instruction Committee for MTC SOL, as well as the actual situation of the university itself. Its curriculum system is oriented towards the core curriculum, supplemented by module expansion curriculum and focused on practical training. The curriculum types and credit distributions are completely consistent with The Guiding Training Program, only that some courses and credit proportions have been adjusted slightly.

One of the problems in the courses offered to the overseas students is that the Chinese teaching curriculum is preferred to the Chinese language curriculum; the second is that some contents of the courses overlap each other; the third is that some courses offered are not so necessary. As to the domestic students, one of the problems in the courses is that the Chinese teaching curriculum is preferred to the curriculum about the ontological knowledge of Chinese; the second is that the foreign language courses provided are lack of flexibility and pertinence, far from being distinctive; the third is that the courses of Chinese talent and skill are comparatively single. Besides, there are also such problems as the repetition of course contents and too many class hours for some electives.

B. Insufficient Internship Location and Duration

The training program requires that the cumulative internship duration for MTC SOL aboard or at home should be no less than half a year, but the internship location and duration arranged by our university is far from enough to meet the needs of all the students. The domestic students primarily practice in the Confucius Institute in Madagascar after passing the interview conducted by China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Second Language, but those who couldn't pass the interview still stay at home. They can only practice in the school of inter-cultural studies of our university that is in charge of Chinese teaching for overseas students, but even the school of inter-cultural studies can only receive a very limited number of interns (due to the small number of overseas students), which will inevitably result in some students' failure to find a place for practice. However, the overseas students' internship is more unsatisfactory in that most of them in our university come from Madagascar and they can't return home to practice teaching Chinese because of economic pressures, while the school of inter-cultural studies generally doesn't consider receiving overseas students as a cadet teacher owing to its consideration to the teaching quality.

C. Unsatisfactory Thesis Quality

The first step of thesis writing is topic selection. Although it's specified in the training program that an academic thesis can be a monographic study, a teaching experiment report, a typical case analysis or a teaching design, but the thesis proposals made by the domestic students of Grade 2010 showed that the range of subject selection was so narrow and single that many topics selected were similar to each other, and most students concentrated their topics on error analysis and acquisition rules of linguistic elements, indicating that the students simply didn't open their mind to more research thoughts. In addition, some overseas students were troubled by the problems that they didn't master the basic writing norms for Chinese academic papers, or they just didn't know how to do research intensively or write clearly.

D. Lagged Teaching Staff Construction

Since most of the students who get the degree of MTC SOL will probably become Chinese teachers teaching abroad or at home after graduation, it is best if the teachers engaged in the training of MTC SOL have experience in teaching Chinese abroad, or at least have experience in teaching Chinese at home. But actually, some teachers neither have the direct experience, nor do they have an academic background related to Chinese teaching. Even worse, they have no academic interest in this at all. As a result, they will inevitably give superficial lessons and fail to link theory with practice well. Under this circumstance, teaching effect and cultivation quality will be greatly affected.

IV. REFORM AND INNOVATION

As the scale of the registration of MTC SOL expands, the problems of the cultivation mode adopted for this new specialty have drawn unprecedented attention. For instance, four nationwide seminars on the personnel training for International Chinese Education have been held till now, four volumes of *Essays and Studies on the personnel training for International Chinese Education* have been published, and the scholars have discussed the cultivation problems of MTC SOL from the perspectives of curriculum provision, course teaching, practice and thesis writing, etc. In addition, Quan Li (2009 & 2012) deeply explored the training targets, teaching philosophy, and training standards of MTC SOL. Besides, relevant issues also attracted attention from Guosheng Wang (2011), Shen Chen (2010), Lifeng Sun (2012) and Yan Tian (2012). These researches have important reference values and heuristic meanings to this paper's discussion on the problem of reform and innovation in the cultivation mode of MTC SOL at normal universities in the underdeveloped areas.

A. Design of the Curriculum not only Oriented towards Career Requirement but also Beneficial to Students' Sustainable Development

Owing to the situation that the overseas students in our university generally didn't learn Chinese for long before admission and their Chinese writing ability urgently needs to

be improved, the share of Chinese language courses ought to be raised, and more attention should be paid to the written language in Chinese teaching. Furthermore, some repeated course contents should also be adjusted, with some unnecessary courses to be deleted. For the domestic students, courses about the ontological knowledge of Chinese can be added to improve their theoretical level, because this will be good for the Chinese teaching and thesis writing they are about to practice or for their further education. Besides, in terms of foreign language curriculum provision, English's monopoly should be broken and students majoring in English should be given exemption from English learning. Meanwhile, in view of the situation that most of the students will practice in Madagascar, they should be encouraged to take French or Malagasy as an elective course. In addition, the courses of Chinese talent and skill should be more diverse, with talents and skills to be diversified.

B. Construction of a Staged, Multi-channel Practical Teaching Model

Apart from such forms as the existing conventional in-class teaching drilling, microteaching, intramural practice and external assignment based on the interview conducted by China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Second Language, the following forms can also be considered in practical teaching:

1) *One-to-one or one-to-more forms.* Every one or two overseas students can be assigned to each domestic student after admission, and the domestic student can become an advanced Chinese tutor after class, who ought to take part in the overseas students' thesis proposals and thesis writing. Then, each overseas student can be requested to find another overseas student with a lower Chinese level in the school of inter-cultural studies, to take responsibility for tutoring this student in spare time.

2) *The students can be encouraged to register in some well-known Chinese teaching websites for online Chinese teaching.*

3) *Resources on campus can be further integrated.* At present, both domestic MTCSOL and overseas MTCSOL are trained in the school of liberal arts, while overseas undergraduate students are taught Chinese in the school of inter-cultural studies, making teaching, internship and practice much less convenient than in one school, so we can consider putting MTCSOL and overseas undergraduate students in the same school.

4) *The cooperation with engineering colleges and medical colleges within the province can be strengthened, with off-campus internship and practice bases to be built.* Despite being located in the same underdeveloped inland region, some engineering colleges and medical colleges in the province have attracted a lot of Southeast and South Asian students due to the features of their subjects and specialities, so we can consider building internship and practice bases in these colleges.

5) *A free Chinese class can be opened.* A certain fund support should be given by the School of Liberal Arts to recruit members from our university or the neighboring colleges and universities for the free Chinese class, so that our graduate students should be able to practice teaching Chinese in class on weekends.

6) *We can actively assist the related functional section of our university in accelerating the construction of Confucius Institute or Confucius Classroom,* to win over more overseas internship opportunities for our students.

C. Establishment of an All-round Thesis Guiding and Monitoring System

Since the degree of MTCSOL is an emerging professional degree, many students, as well as teachers, are still unclear about the distinction between the theses of MTCSOL and those of traditional academic masters majoring in teaching Chinese for foreigners, the students are still accustomed to referring to the patterns of the academic masters' theses when selecting topics and writing theses. Moreover, the teachers are also accustomed to making demands on the theses of MTCSOL in accordance with the standards for academic masters' theses. Therefore, in terms of thesis supervision, apart from requiring the teachers to pay attention to training the students' problematic consciousness and reflective consciousness, we should first request both teachers and students to lay emphasis on grasping the standards for theses of MTCSOL. We can consider giving serial special lectures on thesis writing, to guide the students in everything from content positioning to evaluation criterion and writing pattern in a concrete way. For the overseas students, we can consider offering a thesis-writing course, or integrating the knowledge into the comprehensive course of advanced Chinese. In addition, we should guide the students and let them pay attention to thesis writing, and the supervisor group should control strictly over their thesis proposals and require them to submit some other thesis proposals again if necessary. To control the writing process, the teachers ought to require that the students must hand in the first draft at the end of the fifth semester, so that there should be enough time for modification.

D. Acceleration of Teaching Staff Construction

First, we can consider establishing a teaching and research office for the cultivation of MTCSOL, to strengthen communication between teachers, so as to unify their thoughts and recognitions about the cultivation of MTCSOL. Especially for the teachers who have been engaged in educating academic masters all the time, we should let them fully realize the nature and the characteristics of MTCSOL and help them to set up a certain consciousness of transformation. Second, teaching staff training should be strengthened. The teachers who are interested in the cultivation of MTCSOL can be selected and sent to some domestic and overseas colleges and universities, such as Beijing Language and Culture University or Beijing Normal University, to learn their advanced experiences in the cultivation of MTCSOL. Meanwhile, some teachers can also be selected and sent to the Confucius Institutes abroad, to

increase their experiences in overseas Chinese teaching. Finally, the communication and cooperation with the school of inter-cultural studies in our university or the practice base of other colleges and universities in the province ought to be strengthened, and we should let more and more teachers who teach overseas students Chinese in the front line take part in the cultivation of MTCSOL.

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