

Measures to Deal with the Problems Challenging China's Local Universities in International Scientific Research Cooperation

---- A Case Study of Beijing University of Agriculture

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Abstract - The wide expansion of international education cooperations and exchanges has quickened the relevant scientific research by local universities in China. But the problems of low-quality and inadequate accessibility are felt clearly in such cooperations and exchanges. In this paper, the author believes that measures to deal with those problems should lie in governments, schools, and researchers. The motivations from those organs will effectively improve the quality and accessibility of cooperations in international education research for local universities in China.

Index Terms - local universities; international scientific research and cooperation; problems; countermeasures

As Long-term National Education Reform and Development Plan puts, 'To improve the level of internationalization of education in China we must carry out multi-level and wide-range educational exchanges and cooperation "globalization has also prompted education. Now, a growing number of local colleges and universities set international communication as their development strategy. Take Beijing University of Agriculture for example, one of the six strategies in its twelfth five-year development plan is to strengthen international cooperation and exchanges. Scientific research is vital for the evaluation of higher education, and the research of international cooperation and exchanges is an essential part of it.

1. Problems local colleges and universities confronted in international scientific cooperation

At present, the rapid development of local colleges and universities necessitates their active and characteristic participation in international research cooperation. Main types of cooperation and exchange between colleges and universities at home and abroad are: participation in intergovernmental cooperation projects, such as the projects Beijing University of Agriculture participated like intergovernmental scientific cooperation projects with Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Science and the CIS countries; intercollegiate cooperation projects between local colleges and foreign universities, such as cooperation projects between a Chinese university as Beijing University of Agriculture and a foreign university such as a university from the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, etc; ministries' research funds in international exchanges applied by academic staff. However, in light of the present operating situation, the local agricultural universities

that truly integrate into the international high-level scientific research programs are very limited, and researchers involved in international cooperation and exchange activities are few, and problems like ineffective communication, unprofessional operation resulted in limited accomplishment.

Firstly, opportunities for researchers in China's local universities to participate in international conferences are as few as that they can invite foreign experts to participate in the international cooperation projects they organized. Take Beijing University of Agriculture for example, from 2008 to 2012, there are no more than 5 teachers participated in international conferences annually, only about 5 foreign experts visited school each year, and the number is only 20 for those participated in technology inspection the whole year. Regarding the total number of 320 people visited in five years, this number is less than half of the share. International cooperation agreements through research activities signed very little each year. Again, take Beijing University of Agriculture for example, in nearly five years, 29 agreements were signed with foreign cooperation, including 11 copies of research protocol¹. From the point of view of objects of international cooperation, they mostly come from CIS, Central Europe and South American countries, and partner universities in the United States, Canada, Britain, France and other developed countries are almost no one of the top 50². This made it hard for local universities to get involved in frontier research in international scientific cooperation, and thus local universities missed the chance to learn the latest foreign scientific data and information and was kept in a passive position in international scientific research, and even worse is that our research achievement may be taken by our cooperative agencies. Without reciprocal cooperation and exchange, it is possible that foreign countries would grab China's intellectual and natural resources, while China would lose its proper right to put it good use of its own intellectual property and scientific achievement.

Secondly, management approach of foreign affairs department and finance department at school management

¹ Data from the International Cooperation and Exchange Department of Beijing University of Agriculture.

² Reference of Top 50 universities list of QS World University 2012-2013, Source: China News Network

level is not adaptable to fast-growing scientific research and international exchange. Foreign affairs department of local institutions is responsible for immigration management.

The management of foreign affairs department for scientific research visits is required to focus on official business primarily, including tasks for approval, making of passport on official business and visa applications, etc. The main contradictions of management of foreign affairs and research visits lie in task approval and passport on official business. Approval of foreign affairs department for the number of days to visit is based on invitation letters, such as invitation agenda for Conference abroad (border) is 5 days, the foreign affairs department approves five days for visit accordingly, while the visiting delegates may wish to conduct on-site investigations at the local or pay a visit to some of the relevant agencies, it is impossible for approval without the invitation letter. Approving only one visit task once is a waste of trip cost, a waste of single visiting achievements on oversea resource. In addition, application of passport on official business is also a repeating and time-consuming process for those who already holds a private passport. For some people going abroad to participate in international conference, it may have a short time left from the acceptance of an invitation to the beginning of the meeting, while it takes time to handle the task Certificate and Passport on official business, and cases of delaying the attendance of meeting because of this occur from time to time.

When it comes to scientific research trip, it's often difficult to coordinate for the foreign affairs department and the finance department because of financial limits of trip expenditure. Due to limited amount of financial quota, once it is used up, the annual research trip task will not be completed. Some important and necessary visit tasks of scientific research may thus be canceled and it will cause serious damage for international exchanges of scientific research.

From this we can see, the management approach of school's foreign affairs department and finance department is not compatible, and this is the very reason for slow development of research and international exchange.

Thirdly, management from different authorities at the managerial level makes the international cooperation and exchange of resources ineffective, causing confusion and disorder in management and implementation. Local universities' scientific research of international exchange programs have diverse sources, some are from ministries at national level, some are from government agencies at local provincial level. As to the project management sector, management regulations of the international scientific exchange issued by different departments are not consistent, some departments directly involves in the management while some departments only have partial management power; some sponsor foreign experts to come to the school and participate in research work, and some allow school personnel to visit abroad. Even for a specific project, management approach of different sectors varies with each other. And these different regulations are incompatible with relevant school policies.

This causes great trouble for school's foreign affairs department and researchers, , and thus it is hard to ensure the legitimate for every single cost and no guarantee in quality and quantity”.

2. Measures and suggestions for local colleges and universities to upgrade their quality in international scientific cooperation

Firstly, researchers must take the initiative to "go out." School authority should strengthen macro-regulation and management on international scientific research and cooperation and encourage researchers to participate in international exchanges. School authorities should give long-term policy encouragement and financial support for researchers participating in international exchange of scientific research, and make greater efforts for propaganda towards outworld according to the school's professional features and professional advantages. In addition, school should open up foreign exchange channels. School should arrange researchers' work on campus appropriately and encourage their active participation. In cooperation channels, the school foreign affairs and research departments should jointly set up information team, collecting foreign scientific cooperation information from government departments such as the Ministry of Science, the Ministry of Agriculture, overseas enterprises, and non-governmental organizations and making it publicly known in the campus website timely. School should grasp the opportunity to strive for broader and more international research cooperations in the most active and most positive way. Universities should give full play to the advantages of returning talents to expand the channels and to actively participate in the international forefront scientific research by using research projects. With the introduction of local government's policy of promoting overseas high-end talents, local universities may attract more and more overseas talents. In Beijing University of Agriculture, for example, by 2012, the school has employed more than 100 overseas returned talents. For a local agricultural institution with more than 600 faculty and staff, this is a great resource. From the government's perspective, maximum effort should be made to provide solid backing and support for agricultural universities' international research cooperation. Government should also perform well in targeting international cutting-edge technology for researchers' high-level co-operation; analyze agricultural universities' own discipline strength and resources to find entry point for cooperation; highlight university's academic advantages; actively organize international research teams to participate in major research projects and promote international equal cooperation.

Secondly, various departments should coordinate with each other, standardize management and take joint efforts. School's foreign affairs, research, and the financial sectors should coordinate with each other so as to form a long-term mechanism in promoting scientific research and international exchanges and cooperation.

The foreign affairs department and finance department should jointly set management approaches for visiting funds, implement category management, separate international scientific research and cooperation funds from official visit funding management. School should classify management for official visit funding. For instance, it can be divided into following categories: public funds of general inspection for international exchange; research project funding of international exchange, such as funding teachers apply from the NSFC, which is specifically used for foreign exchange; special training funds allocated for various functional sectors; international cooperative education funding; funding for students practice abroad. For above types of funds, school authority should implement scientific and effective management, investigate the covered portion of finance funding limit for official visit, rather than taking a simple and unrealistic "one size fits all" approach, with financial funds limit covering funding limits for international exchange activities of whole school, particularly covering scientific research funding of international exchange. Only by classified management, can local universities meet more international cooperation, grasp the opportunities, and compete for broader and more international research cooperation opportunities in most active and most positive way.

Meanwhile, the foreign affairs department and scientific research department should jointly arrange specialized staff to supervise foreign research projects, strengthen daily management of international scientific and technological cooperation projects. They should carry out policy education and procedural guidance mainly for personnel involved in the project, supervise personnel involved in the project not only comply with the relevant laws and regulations, but also regard the interests of the country and the school as a precondition in the international scientific cooperation activities. The two departments should also collect the application information for international research projects, strengthen management on project application, initiation and post-processing. They should have good performance in construction and improvement of related rules and regulations of international research and cooperation, and standardize their management. Also they should strengthen communication among various departments of local universities in scientific research

cooperation. The responsibilities of various departments and division of labor should be clearly defined. Only in a sound and effective regulatory norms can international scientific research work be carried out orderly in planned way.

Thirdly, regulations of government departments should be orderly and unified, and compatibility of policies should be strengthened. From the government's perspective, the compatibility of cross-departments policy should be coordinated and the situation of universities' responding to different management departments and getting lost should be avoided. As for the projects related to the international exchange of scientific research, different departments should give priority to foreign affairs and formulate compatible cross-sectoral financial management system regarding visiting mission of scientific research. Foreign affairs, scientific research and financial departments should cooperate strongly and study relative policy that can reflect efficient and compatible regulations.

In conclusion, international scientific research cooperation and exchange is a systematic project. It needs the cooperation and joint promotion from governments, schools, and researchers. Only by doing this can universities' international scientific research work have a revolutionary development.

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