

Internationalizing Project to Challenge Social Transition and Globalization Through Educational Communication Across Cultures

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This paper describes the internationalizing project attempted by Shenzhen Polytechnic, a Chinese national prototype polytechnic, as a long-term development strategy to meet the impact of social transition in the context of globalization. The project came into practice through educational communication across cultures, which has succeeded in initiating a set of market-driven operational paradigms, benefiting from intellectual resources around the world, reconstructing the governance mechanism, and broadening visions of the staff by extensive academic exchanges. From this evidence, the article concludes that accelerated globalization offers more opportunities than threats for social development and that China's development owes greatly to the advancement of the world.

As stated by Hartley and Montgomery (2009), although "China continues to be characterized by strong central-policy settings, as the domestic consumer market matures there is greater scope for consumer-led creative business development" (p. 2). In this social context, "internationalizing" (Hartley & Montgomery, 2009, p. 2) has been widely attempted as "a globally contestable policy" (Cunningham, 2009, p. 13) in order to challenge the social transition domestically and the impact of globalization internationally. This article explains China's higher vocational and technical education in relation to an internationalizing project at Shenzhen Polytechnic. This article also explains how this project is put into practice through international educational exchanges and collaborations.

Instead of the literal translation, we coin *educational communication across cultures* for the discussion on the basis of "professional communication" (Smith, 1966, p. v). Because "we are members of a particular corporate group, a particular professional or occupational group," "each of us is simultaneously a member of many different discourse systems" (Scollon & Scollon, 2000, p. 3). The definitions happen to coincide with the implication of the internationalizing project in this article. According to Wood (1994), the term *communication* is "a dynamic, systematic process in which meanings are created and reflected in human interaction" (p. 28). Therefore, the phrasal term educational communication across cultures in this article means the communication in the field of education across cultures for academic exchanges and collaborations.

A Survey of the Internationalizing Project

Background

Under the influence of the plan-oriented economy and traditional paradigm of teaching in China, a lot of emphasis was placed on theoretical studies in tertiary education. This has led

to “our emphasis on systematic learning and theoretical knowledge” (Shangguan, 2005, p. 138) and the shortage of qualified professionals with specific skills for the market-driven economy.

To cope with the problem, some researchers suggest “building another ‘highway’ immediately” (Hu, 2006, p. 5), which refers to higher vocational and technical education, in comparison with the research-oriented universities as the first highway. The second highway is to be built for the production of qualified professionals. To build such a highway, an extensive and intensive reform has been carried out among China’s vocational and technical institutions. Among them, Shenzhen Polytechnic, the first higher vocational and technical institute bearing the name of polytechnic in mainland China, has made remarkable achievements by carrying out a long-term development plan in the name of an internationalizing project (International Office, 2009). This project has been put into practice mainly in three respects: (1) creating a set of market-driven operational paradigms, (2) benefiting from intellectual resources around the world, and (3) broadening visions of the staff by extensive academic exchanges.

Initiating Market-Driven Operational Paradigms

A leading scholar at Shenzhen Polytechnic maintains that “international exchange and collaboration have played an important role in Shenzhen Polytechnic’s rapid growth” (Guan, 2008, p. 15). In the past decade and a half, the polytechnic has adopted various educational paradigms from around the world to initiate a set of market-driven operational paradigms that are different from research-oriented universities in China. The operational paradigms are specified as *the dual system*, *the competence-centered guidelines*, and *the professional consultancy committee*.

The dual system is an operational paradigm seen in German polytechnic universities, which “combines in-school learning with in-service training in order to produce qualified professionals” (Jiang, 1998, p. 19). For this purpose, the Polytechnic has set up an industrial center, equipped with necessary workshops for in-school training. In addition, enough practice bases in various industries for in-service training have been established for the polytechnic in the local region.

In the area of curriculum development, the Polytechnic has designed a series of courses using a three-in-one syllabus paradigm, composed of “principle,” “practice,” and “product” (Jiang, 1998, pp. 78-81). Any course of study covers general subjects, professional courses, and vocational skills. Insights into this paradigm were found in Canada and Germany. In curriculum development in Canada, the community colleges consistently focus on competence-centered policy. Similarly, German polytechnic universities stress “the practice of elementary theories, applicable sciences, and professional skills” (Jiang, 1998, p. 19).

To keep in close contact with industries, the community colleges in Canada invite experts from all trades to set up various professional consultant committees. The Polytechnic has adopted this paradigm wholeheartedly, inviting professionals and managers from various industries to organize “a committee of professional consultants for each course” (Jiang, 1998, pp. 142-143). The committees hold meetings twice a year. Both academics and professionals

exchange ideas on the modification of course contents for the needs of the market-driven economy.

Thus, a set of market-driven operational paradigms has been formed and put into practice at the Polytechnic, resulting in a sustained high rate of employment for its graduates, standing at 95% in recent years. This set of operational paradigms can be stated thus: Shenzhen Polytechnic consistently offers courses fulfilling the needs of the job market and the local economy. A comparative study in education between China and more developed countries demonstrates the idea that “we regard the textbook as a virtual society, and they regard real society as the textbook” (Shangguan, 2005, p. 57). Obviously, the Polytechnic has broken new ground in tertiary education reform in the interest of social transition in the country.

Benefiting from Intellectual Resources Around the World

In January 1997, the Polytechnic reached an agreement with a British university on a top-up program, referring to “the final undergraduate courses” offered by the British university (Guan, Fan, Bailey, & Wang, 2006, p. 113) for the Polytechnic graduates. To date, the Polytechnic has reached such agreements on top-up programs with over 10 universities in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Russia, and Canada. On the basis of these agreements, Polytechnic graduates can continue their academic studies at collaborative universities overseas. The number of students who have participated in such top-up programs since 1997 has totaled over 1000. Miss Yu Dan, a top-up program student, remarks that “studying abroad is not just pursuing a degree, but most importantly it opens my mind. It makes me think globally and independently. It helps me start at a much higher level in my career path” (Guan, Fan, Bailey, & Wang, 2006, p. 165).

As for the student exchange program, Polytechnic students are formed into groups to pay short-term academic visits during summer and winter vacations. In the past five years, the Polytechnic offered courses for more than 500 students to visit its collaborative universities in South Korea, Japan, Russia, Spain, the USA, and the UK. More than 380 students were organized to take short-term courses in collaborative universities in France, Spain, Russia, Germany, Japan, and South Korea. Similarly, a number of summer and winter courses were organized for over 1000 students in 31 groups from South Korea, Japan, the UK, and the USA in the past three years. This program is helpful in promoting mutual understanding for young students from different cultures. In all, the Polytechnic has established “long-term and stable cooperative relationships with more than 40 universities and educational organizations outside of mainland China” (About Shenzhen Polytechnic, 2010, p. 1).

In recent years, the Polytechnic started two co-teaching programs that develop courses jointly and deliver jointly. The program in collaboration with an Australian institution offers International Business at the Polytechnic. The Australian institution is responsible for course design, teaching material preparation, and setting of testing criteria. The program in collaboration with a Japanese institution concerns training in the use of electronic medical equipment at the Polytechnic. The Japanese institution is responsible for course design. Currently, the Polytechnic is in negotiation with some other universities internationally for more potential collaborations in the near future.

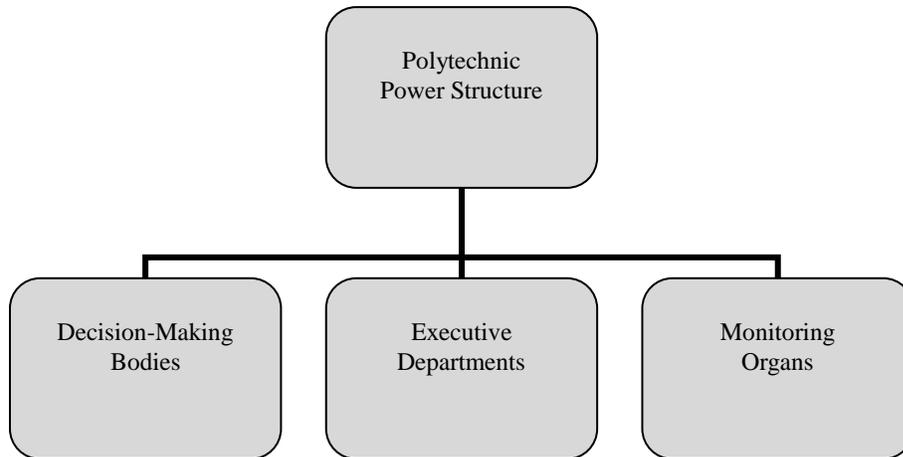


Figure 1. A parallel governance mechanism.

To take the advantages of the local joint venture industries, Shenzhen Polytechnic has established close ties with a number of world-class transnational corporations. In this way, the Polytechnic has granted network specialist certification for 94 trainers, and 28 trainers have been awarded certificates as database experts. In all, the Polytechnic is able to offer skill-training programs for 63 kinds of world-wide professional certificates.

Reconstructing the Governance Mechanism

Any governance mechanism is the legacy of a given culture, rooted in the practices or attitudes of the long history of its political society; therefore, it cannot change overnight. We argue that this is the case in the Chinese context. It is true that great changes have taken place over the past three decades in almost all spheres of life. But, the shadow of “the parental system” (Smith, 2009, p. 74) is still in the air and inferiors have to be obedient to superiors. In many cases, the head of an organization is the sole decision maker. Even today, an open-minded superior is usually what the public hopes for. From this point of view, the current governance mechanism in China is the inheritance of the system of the planned-oriented economy along with a strong influence of the traditional parental system.

To meet this need, the Polytechnic has taken actions by setting up necessary monitoring organs. This includes a professoriate commission in human resources, a professoriate commission in finance, an auditing office, an inspection office, and so on. These organs have taken respective responsibilities on important matters such as staff recruitment, annual budgets, and large facility purchases. Obviously, this reconstruction aims to balance the power and authority among the decision-making bodies, the executive departments, and the monitoring organs (see Figure 1). Clearly, the parental system has been replaced by “the collective mechanism,” which “works better than the individual” (Xue & Chen, 2004, p. 7).

Simultaneously, the Polytechnic has issued a series of governance regulations in human resource management, financial management, teaching and research, foreign affairs, health and security, and other areas. In the past two academic years, more than 30 documents were issued, such as *Regulations for the Professoriate Commission in Human Resources*, *Rules on Human Resources Management*, and *Revised Regulations on Staff Management*.

The purpose of the documents above is to enable the school to function under the rules and regulations instead of the authority of the individual. This indicates that the Polytechnic is on the way to manage under the rule of law. For example:

To All Departments Concerned:

Mr. XXX of the School of Economics and Administration was late by 30 minutes on an examination day, which is a violation of Item 3 in *Responsibilities of Examiners at Shenzhen Polytechnic* stating that “any examiner should arrive at the examination site 15 minutes prior to the designated test time.” In accordance with Item 2 of *Shenzhen Polytechnic Teaching Accident Treatment Regulations*, “a delay of over 5 minutes” shall be recognized as an Academic Mishap Class III (A18).

This notice is intended to avert the repetition of such mishaps and any further violation shall be recognized as an academic mishap accordingly.

Shenzhen Polytechnic
2009-7-3

Figure 2. A notice on an academic mishap.

In the notice above, the delay is defined as a mishap in accordance with a related regulation. Anyone who violates the rule will get the same treatment. No matter who occupies the office of the president, the mishap will be dealt with in the same way. This fully shows that the Polytechnic has made in-roads in the construction of a Chinese characteristic legal system in the practice of school operations.

Broadening Visions of the Staff by Extensive Academic Exchanges

A survey shows that the Polytechnic has arranged over 2000 scholars into 350 teams to visit universities in Hong Kong and Macao, and received over 6000 visitors from those universities since 1994. The Polytechnic has established collaborative relationships with 12 universities in Taiwan, sending over 150 staff in 10 groups for academic visits and receiving over 100 visitors from Taiwan. The Polytechnic has also organized five summer and winter courses for about 1000 students from Taiwan. In particular, the Polytechnic has sponsored three seminars on vocational and technical education for participants from Beijing, Shanghai, Taiwan, and Shenzhen. In 2004, the Polytechnic was approved to recruit full-time students from Taiwan, Macao, and Hong Kong (International Office, 2009).

As one measure for the project, the Polytechnic has recruited approximately 100

academic staff members with overseas educational backgrounds, along with recruitment of more than 80 international staff members from 10 different countries. Simultaneously, the Polytechnic has arranged for 291 staff members to take short-term training in the UK, the USA, Australia, France, Germany, Canada, Japan, and South Korea. The Polytechnic has offered seven different foreign languages, including English, German, French, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Selection of teaching materials in English or relevant foreign languages is now encouraged. Bilingual instruction has been introduced into some of the classrooms at the Polytechnic. Besides, the Polytechnic has received “more than 30,000 visitors from other universities and educational organizations at home and abroad” (*About Shenzhen Polytechnic*, 2010, p. 1).

Insights Beyond the Internationalizing Project

An Access to Mutual Understanding Across Cultures

At present, the internationalizing project is widely recognized as one of the typical features of the Polytechnic among Chinese polytechnics (International Office, 2009). Beyond the visible achievements as mentioned previously, it has more weight for individuals to build life-long personal friendships across cultures. In a broad sense, the Polytechnic has made a contribution at the organizational level in promoting mutual understanding across cultures. To offer the British Council’s congratulations to the Polytechnic and a British university on the tenth anniversary of their collaboration, a senior official on behalf of the British Council points out that “it would be difficult to find a better example of this kind of collaboration” and that “there is no better way than this of helping China and the UK have cultural relations that endure” (Hollington, 2006, p. 1). The top-up program as described has been widely accepted by Chinese polytechnics as “a collaborative model” (Guan, Fan, Bailey, & Wang, 2006, p. 120) to develop educational communication across cultures.

Globalization Offering More Opportunities Than Threats

Recently, the market-driven paradigm of the Polytechnic was awarded by the state Ministry of Education as “a right way” (Liu, 2009, p. 1) in terms of educational reform when the Polytechnic was officially accredited by the Ministry as a national prototype polytechnic for its achievements and contributions in terms of education reform and creation over the past 16 years.

As we all know, the past decade and a half has witnessed a profound social transition in China and the acceleration of globalization in the world. In debates about globalization, some regard it as “happy news” (Xue & Cao, 2005, p. 2) that it serves as an engine to start another reform in China (Liu, 2002, p. 105), and mankind’s ideological evolution will end in the universalization of Western liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1992). Some others consider it as “calamities” (Xue & Cao, 2005, p. 2) that the clash of civilizations will be the battle lines of the future (Huntington, 1999) and globalization is designated for westernization or Americanization (Cai, 2002; Hong, 2002; Tang, 2002). Curiously, Party A’s happy news

happens to be Party B's calamities and vice versa. For example, China rising is regarded as a threat to some others. As stated by Saint-Exupery (1900-44), "What sets us against one another is not our aims—they all come to the same thing—but our methods" (Samovar, Porter, & Stefani, 2003, p. 22). We agree that globalization is a challenge to all countries in the world. The present financial turmoil soundly convinces that it is not judicious to enlarge the existing gap between the East and the West either politically or ideologically.

Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, we maintain that the accelerated globalization offers more opportunities than threats for social development and that China's development has benefited from the progress of the international community. Successes or failures in challenging the impact of globalization depend largely on our methods rather than our aims and on our way of treating each other in particular. A Chinese proverb says, "A stone from other hills may serve to polish the jade of this one." The proverb means that a good quality of others can remedy our own defects, and perfectly describes the significance that globalization has had on the Polytechnic. As a matter of fact, nothing could be achieved for the Polytechnic without the social transition in China and the accelerated globalization in the world.

As a coin has two sides, the internationalizing project is also argued in a weak voice as taking a risk of being westernized, Americanized, or Europeanized in China. Some people still hold the idea that globalization means westernization or Ameicanization, which is a violation of the traditional value of the Chinese culture and the isolationist road. The other concern is that the effectiveness of the project depends largely on "enough cultural reserve, a sober mastery of both source and target languages, and the appropriate communicative skills" (Guan, 2005, p. 111) of communicators, because it is people who conduct the communication and challenge the impact of globalization. Virtually, many people have not been prepared well in meeting the impact of globalization.

Notes

1. This article is based on a contribution under the title "Internationalization as an Approach to Social Transition and Globalization through Educational Communication" to 2009 IAICS Conference at Kumamoto Gakuen University, Kumamoto, Japan September 18-20, 2009.
2. All figures without specific references in this essay are quoted from the report by Professor Hong-yi Liu, President of Shenzhen Polytechnic in January 2009, "Carry Out the Internationalization Project Under the Guidance of Scientific Development Thought." This report can also be accessed from the Internet Office of Shenzhen Polytechnic.

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