

# ***Research on the Characteristics of Overseas Schools Run by Chinese Universities in the Background of "the Belt and Road"***

***—Take Bangkok Business School of Yunnan University of Finance and Economics as an Example***

Li Hongmin\*

International Cooperation & Exchange Office  
Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, YUFE  
Kunming, China  
bizlynn@hotmail.com

Li Zhifei

International Cooperation & Exchange Office  
Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, YUFE  
Kunming, China  
lizhifei1115@126.com

**Abstract**—Overseas education of colleges and universities is a new creator when the internationalization of high education in one country reaches a certain level. In China, it is an important form of the "going out" policy in higher education, and one of the important ways to enhance the level of internationalization as well. As a school innovation product in the internationalization of China's higher education in the new period of running, the most important problems to be solved by overseas educational institutions include how to deal with the fast speed of higher education internationalization trend, how to deal with the new situation that participating in competition among international universities and colleges, and how to make efforts to innovate and develop, show the characteristics, and take the road of sustainable development. Taking Bangkok Business School of Yunnan University of Finance and Economics as an example, on the basis of the analysis of the main methods of cultivating characteristics of running schools, the paper analyzes the main practical problems facing by such overseas institutions when creating its own competitive school-running characteristics, and then discusses the routing selections.

**Keywords**—overseas school running; school characteristics; practical problems; routing selection; Bangkok Business School

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of the world economic globalization, internationalization of higher education becomes a key trend. It is significant that a country or a region expands its educational opening-up and strengthen its educational international communication and exchange under such a circumstance. China's overseas school-running activities can be dated back to the late part of the twentieth century. Along with China's growing comprehensive national power and sustained deepening and expanding of education internationalization, higher education in China has quickened the pace of "going global", while continuing to get done with the "inviting in" strategy, the enthusiasm of carrying out overseas school-running activities is significantly improved among colleges

and universities.

The concept of "overseas school-running activities" as mentioned in this paper refers to such a scenario that colleges and universities take mainland China as the boundary, set up educational institutions with overseas citizens as main target students or take other forms to implement education and teaching activities, and carry out higher education, degree education or non-academic higher education independently or through cooperation with overseas educational institutions or other social organizations possessing the status of a legal person and accredited by the government of the countries (regions) where they are located [5]. As of July 2016, Chinese universities have established a total of five overseas educational institutions and 98 programs distributed within 14 countries and regions [7]. Generally, China's overseas school-running activity is still in infantile stage. Either the number or the scale of the existing institutions and programs is small, and the overall development level is relatively low. There are many development issues remain to be solved.

On April 16, 2013, Yunnan University of Finance and Economics (YUFE) signed a cooperation agreement with Rangsit University, Thailand, and decided to team up for the establishment of Bangkok Business School (BBS), YUFE in Bangkok, Thailand. Approved by the China Ministry of Education on December 31, 2013, BBS has become China's third overseas education institution and also the unique education institution with record of formal schooling and academic degree approved for establishment in Thailand. By relying on the campus and the existing hardware facilities of Rangsit University as the program base, principals from both universities attended the inauguration ceremony for BBS at Rangsit University in July 2014, symbolizing the formal establishment of this school and commencement of enrollment. By the end of 2016, a total of 110 non-Chinese undergraduate students had been enrolled [8]. After nearly three years of development since its inception, BBS takes the construction of characteristics as its work centrality and the strategic way

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\* Corresponding author

to improve the competitiveness of the institution. Now it becomes a typical case in the cooperation in school-running between domestic and foreign universities and plays a certain positive role in promoting international exchanges of Chinese higher education and opening wider to the outside world under the Belt & Road Initiative. Based on the BBS's experience, this paper analyzes the problems facing by such overseas institutions when creating their own competitive school-running characteristics. And several suggestions for the improvement of overseas school-running activities and reinforcement of school-running characteristics are proposed.

## II. MAIN PRACTICES OF BBS TO FOSTER ITS SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

School characteristics refers to "the distinct characteristics formed in the institutions of higher education in the long process of running which adapt to the social and economic development, conforms to the education law of development, and benefit its own survival and development[2]. Cultivating school characteristics is an important part of educational development and the main embodiment of education's high quality development[6]. It is believed in the Scheme for the Assessment on Undergraduate Teaching of Higher-Educational Universities/Colleges (Trial) issued by the China Ministry of Education that the characteristics of a university/college are embodied in the following four levels: (1) the general principle of management, the idea and theme of running; (2) features on education, the education model, the talent feature; (3) the characteristics of teaching -- the course system, the teaching method and the solution of important questions in teaching reform; (4) the characteristics of teaching management -- scientific and advanced teaching management system and operation mechanism, etc.

As prescribed by the definition of MOE China, BBS had made attempts and practices as follow:

### A. School-running pattern

Different to the establishment of branch schools in other regions within Mainland China, colleges and universities have to undertake high financial risks in the process of setting up overseas institutions. It is expressly stipulated in China's current fiscal policy that public colleges and universities are not allowed to invest in running schools in foreign regions & countries. Most of the funding required for running schools in foreign regions & countries depends on the collection of social funds. In this case, if the school funding can not be guaranteed, colleges and universities are likely to be faced with huge losses, and even forced to terminate overseas school-running programs. Foreign counterparts have experienced a lot of such lessons. For example, the branch school of UNSW (University of New South Wales) in Singapore only lasted for two months, and a total loss of US\$38 million was caused. The branch school of MSU (Michigan State University) in Dubai has lost several millions of U.S. dollars and stopped enrolling undergraduates since 2010. It remains uncertain whether this school will continue to operate[7]. Based on the above conditions and experiences, ideas and methods complying with the actual situation of YUFE were adopted in the construction of BBS. That is, instead of investing in land, real

estate, equipment and other large fixed assets during the construction process, Rangsit University, the Thailand partner, was relied on in terms of utilizing its existing school-running conditions and advantages in source of students, sharing relevant school-running facilities, and rapid entry into the implementation stage of school-running program through integration of resources and aversion of risks. In this way, the "YUFE model" of overseas school-running activity was successfully explored.

### B. Disciplines and specialties

Discipline and specialty construction with characteristics is not only the key to the development of a university, but also an index to measure the quality and level of one. We can say, the preponderant discipline of a university is where its comparative characteristic lies.

At present, such problems as small school-running scale, relatively single disciplines and specialties exist in the overseas school-running programs of Chinese colleges and universities and most disciplines and specialties do not meet the highest international levels except that traditional Chinese medicine & acupuncture, Chinese language & culture, martial arts & sports and other traditional disciplines and specialties possessing obvious advantages that can not be replaced by other countries. The setup of discipline serves as an important link that realizes the docking of overseas school-running institutions with the socio-economic development of targeted countries of prospective students and ensures the personnel training to meet the social needs of such countries. At the time of establishing overseas institutions, whether it is possible to insist on the demand-led principle, focus a keen sight on overseas market, actively adapt to the demands of overseas market, create famous disciplines with innovative thinking, create disciplines having zero distance with the market and highlight the advantages and characteristics of their own is directional matters of determining whether such institutions can meet the social needs.

During the initial planning of BBS, full considerations are given to the actual conditions of economic and social development in Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries. Positioning at the cultivation of international professionals (for students from Southeast Asia and South Asia countries and regions) in finance, law and other fields with the possibility of obtaining undergraduate and master's degrees of China, and satisfaction of the needs of Thailand and other South Asia and Southeast Asian countries for highly qualified business professionals, YUFE's outstanding disciplines of finance & investment and ASEAN international trade law are optimized as the first batches of pilot disciplines, by which source of students in southeast and South Asian countries are absorbed, and the dilemma of cross-border enrollment are quickly surmounted.

### C. Teaching staffs

It is crucial for running a university to have a batch of teachers of high quality. The characteristics of disciplines and specialties are mostly formed by the features of their teachers. Awaiting this, BBS gets the utmost out of the teachers from two parties. Relying on its 17-year international school-

running experiences and 6 Sino-foreign cooperatively-run education programs, YUFE has created a team proficient in English teaching, international negotiation, program planning, operation & management and other aspects, and staffs in this team possess a solid professional foundation and rich practical experiences, which enables the teaching staffs of BBS to possess obvious internationalization characteristics, and guarantee the accomplishment of overseas school running with quality assured in terms of teaching and management activities.

#### *D. Teaching and assessment*

First of all, students enrolled by BBS are strictly managed according to the requirements of YUFE and Rangsit University. After enrollment, students have to register at both universities at the same time and their information will be entered into China Higher-education Student Information (chsi.com.cn) for students' registration management. Through the double registration, students may choose to study in Bangkok during the entire studies, or go to the headquarters of YUFE for 1-3 academic years as exchange students and the credit transfer can be easily realized.

Secondly, the training program, teaching outline, teaching plan and curriculum system for various majors at BBS are jointly formulated by teachers from both sides, and graduation theses are also jointly instructed and reviewed by teachers from both sides. Core curriculums are taught and assessed by YUFE's teachers accredited to Bangkok, while the qualified teachers for remaining curriculums are determined by both sides.

Third, BBS actively explores the orderly quality assurance mechanism under the premise that there is no complete system for assessing the overseas school-running quality. Until now, it has established the teaching quality monitoring system for teacher selection & recruitment, classroom teaching assessment, teaching process supervision and teaching effect assessment, conducted quality self-assessments of the BBS program according to the respective internal assessment systems, and strengthened the internal supervision. At the same time, BBS is also annually reviewed by the Ministry of Education of Thailand. Following the establishment of overseas school-running quality assessment system formulated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese-side will also receive corresponding assessment, so as to ensure the teaching quality.

#### *E. Management and operation mechanism*

Based on the full integration of management experiences and wisdom of YUFE and Thailand Rangsit University, and under the supervision of the management committee jointly established by both sides, BBS has established the training mode, management method, communication & consultation and assessment mechanism for the cooperative program, and one department head has been respectively designated from both China and Thailand for the organization and implementation. The establishment of the management committee has effectively avoided such unfavorable situations as lack of coordination and relatively scattered in the previous programs of cooperative running of schools, effectively

guaranteed the operation and management of the institution, and provided important conditions for the exploration of management mechanism featured with Sino-foreign integration. In the school management committee, there are three members from YUFE, and the remaining three come from Rangsit University. All these staffs are senior management personnel from their respective universities and preside over teaching and foreign affairs. The director of the management committee is assumed by a member appointed by the Chinese side, and the deputy director is assumed by a member appointed by the Thailand side. The management committee holds a conference at least once a year. In addition to summarizing the previous work and progress of the school, it also organizes discussions about major adjustments and plans of the school and also makes arrangements for the next phase of work.

In addition, the two universities have revised the talent training program and implementation plan for various specialties, determined the curriculum setting, implementation plan, teaching plan and teaching program, drafted the teaching quality monitoring system for teacher selection & recruitment, classroom teaching assessment, teaching process supervision, teaching effect assessment and other requirements for overseas school-running activities, prepared the teaching manuals for overseas students, and laid down the credit swaps, reciprocal exchange programs for teachers and other operation & management mechanisms, so as to ensure the smooth implementation of the school-running program.

The establishment of the management committee and corresponding operating mechanisms has provided important institutional mechanisms for the exertion of respective advantages and integrated innovation on both sides. Based on the exertion of hardware resources and daily management advantages in Thailand, the Chinese side is bold enough to realize the outputs of YUFE's advanced specialties, teaching resources and teaching staffs, and further promote the realization of such strategic objective as enabling BBS to become a high-level university of finance & economy with certain educational influence and competitiveness in South and Southeast Asia.

### III. MAIN PROBLEMS FOR OVERSEAS INSTITUTIONS CREATING CHARACTERISTICS

In terms of the present state of development of BBS, creating characteristics is facing many difficulties and problems, which is mainly reflected in professional disciplines, faculty, the school system and mechanism, etc.

#### *A. Disciplines*

At present, the discipline construction and professional setting of BBS are mainly based on the schools of the parent university. Some of YUFE's existing advantageous subjects and majors are selected. This is the pillar of the school and its inevitable choice in the initial stage. But in the long run, the "copy" model is not conducive to formation of the school's own characteristic subjects and majors, which is even likely to cause the imbalance in the supply and demand of teachers and talents.



### *B. Faculty*

BBS has not yet established a relatively stable full-time faculty but is entirely dependent on its parent university. Due to the lack of its own stable characteristic faculty, many major events related to the construction of the school only relies on the parent university, e.g. the construction of disciplines and majors, and the revise of personnel cultivating program, etc. The teaching content, teaching method, the examination method and so on also do not get rid of the passive situation of copying the parent university, which greatly restricts the implementation and the formation of characteristics in the overseas institution.

### *C. School-running system*

So far, although organically combining with partner Thailand Rangsit University, the school system and mechanism of the Bangkok Business School is basically the direct extension of school system and mechanism in Yunnan University of Finance and Economics. In addition, the decision-making system and mechanism of the management committee are not yet fully developed, which is restricted by domestic policies and regulations concerning finance, assets and personnel flows. The financial budget, asset management and personnel flow management system of BBS as an overseas school entity have not been effectively established. Under such a system, foreign schools lack the effective institutional guarantee to adapt to overseas markets and create the characteristics of running schools.

### *D. Other external factors*

At present, Confucius institutes and Confucius classrooms are strongly supported by the Office of Chinese Language Council International and China Scholarship Council, etc., and international students in China are also receiving scholarships from different levels. But from the practical experience of BBS, as one main carrier of national education export and important way for developing foreign students, there is still a shortage of funds from the State "going out" policy to run schools abroad. No scholarship application channels is available. In the absence of policy and funding support, the development and reform of overseas schools is in the "spontaneous" stage to a certain extent, completely lying in the market-driven competition of higher education. Due to the lack of driving force, the development of the overseas school and the target orientation are compulsorily transferred, which cause more difficulties for these overseas institutions to form their characteristics.

## **IV. ROUTINGS TO ESTABLISH THE CHARACTERISTICS OF OVERSEAS INSTITUTIONS**

### *A. To comply with the needs of economic and social development nationally and locally, and construct subjects with distinct international characteristics*

In July 2016, the Ministry of Education formulated the "Action Pushing forward the Joint Construction of the 'Belt & Road'" to make it clear that institutions of higher education should participate in the "The Belt and Road" program based on their respective development strategies and regional

participation. All the work should be developed harmoniously, e.g. to engage in various forms of cooperation and communication with countries along the line and focus on perfecting the modern university system, innovative talent training mode, improve the overseas students' quality, and optimize the foreign cooperation in running schools[4]. That same year when the Ministry of Education formulated the "Action Pushing forward the Joint Construction of the 'Belt & Road'", the Ministry of Education signed a memorandum of international cooperation with eight provinces (areas), Gansu, Ningxia, Fujian, Guizhou, Yunnan, Guangxi, Hainan, Xinjiang, thus the education opening to the outside world is the focus of the "the Belt and Road" strategy and the 13th Five-year plan. Through the practical experience of BBS, we believe that the establishment of a overseas institution should conform to the needs of the state and local economic and social development, and actively serve the national development strategy and the "Going Out" strategy of Chinese enterprises and combine with the national "the Belt and Road" initiative. Combining with advantages of location and disciplines, on the basis of consolidating the existing finance and international business majors, we are trying to create international specialty subjects and majors that adapt to the needs of foreign students.

### *B. Based on the development requirement of the specialty subjects, make full efforts to create an international faculty with reasonable structure, high level and excellent quality*

Faculty with reasonable structure, high level and excellent quality is the driving force of the sustainable development of schools abroad. According to the situation of BBS, the following work should be done well:

A reasonable and relatively stable faculty should be established as soon as possible. In order to meet the actual needs of the teaching management of overseas schools, the plan should combine the specialties of the subjects, the characteristics of the students and the scale of the school. Measures should be taken to prevent the formation of such situation that the faculty of the overseas school is to digest or relocate the redundant personnel from their parent university and prevent high mobility of teaching managers. Otherwise, it will seriously damage the management efficiency, image and reputation of the school.

To establish and improve the institutional environment and encourage the formation of special teachers. The school should make full use of advantages of flexible mechanisms of overseas schools, establish and perfect a set of suitable employing system and incentive system for their own development as soon as possible which is different from the parent university according to the goal of creating school characteristics. The rules are to be set up on demand, hired on duty, paid for work and contract management, to gradually optimize the overall structure of teachers, improve the overall quality and level of teachers, and finally to form an international faculty with high level as soon as possible.

*C. To optimize the training mode of international specialty talents and cultivate the international talents with high-level*

The cultivation of talents with international characteristics is inseparable from the international training mode. When the overseas school selects the training mode for talents, it is important to understand the characteristics of international students. On the other hand, the demand for talents in the international market should be studied and to build and optimize the curriculum based on international market demand. On the adjustment of the curriculum structure, it is also necessary to cut and restructure the content of teaching in accordance with the requirements of the profession, and pay attention to the combination of knowledge and skill.

*D. To set up a high level interdisciplinary international research and exchange platform*

To rely on overseas educational institutions fully arouse the Chinese and foreign teachers' scientific research enthusiasm; to establish effective incentive mechanism, strengthen scientific research projects and results of cultivating, and create a good academic atmosphere. The school should adhere to the strategy of "bringing in" and "going out" and actively encourage and support teachers and students to participate in bilateral, multilateral and regional international academic exchanges and scientific research cooperation. The advantageous, strong disciplines and the new disciplines that are developed as planned or interdisciplinary disciplines should be focused on. To set up several research and innovation teams in a plan and in batches to develop the scientific team sustainably. It should be necessary to strengthen the cooperation with overseas universities and colleges, research institutions and enterprises to establish an innovative platform for international scientific research collaboration with regional influence.

To make full use of the functions of the cultural dissemination of the overseas school and build a regional international cultural hub

To vigorously implement the cultural exchange mechanism that lays importance to both "import" and "export"; to expand the cultural exchange channels between domestic

universities and foreign universities, scientific research institutions, enterprises and government agencies, etc. and build a stable international cultural exchange hub by taking the overseas school as an exchange platform; to cultivate the students study in the overseas school to be international cultural exchange ambassadors by applying an international education mode, so as to fully improve the school's image in the education receiving countries and regions, and even in the word and help the export of the educational characteristics, culture and national soft power.

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