

The University's International Responsibilities in the Era of Globalization

I. Harsh realities in the era of globalization

In his famous short works *Misery*, *Sorrow* and *Sleepy*, Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) a great Russian novelist and dramatist depicted how difficult it was to overcome the gulf between people due to lack of communication and understanding and the resulting suspicion and precaution, and one remained a stranger and incomprehensible to the other. If mutual understanding was hard to come by between individuals in the same nation, understanding between nations and countries would be even harder. Today in an era of globalization featuring “the world is flat” and “liquid modernity”, traveling across borders is no longer limited to someone “living elsewhere”. However, when facing other civilizations different from one's own and the Tower of Babel involving different groups, people are prone to doubt and suspicion, which are root causes of conflicts. *Global Risks 2015* (10th edition) by the World Economic Forum noted interstate conflict is the most likely global risk in the next ten years. At the micro level, there are numerous conflicts between local and international students or among international students themselves, as documented by news reports in Australian, Ukrainian and Japanese media. (MacWilliams, B.¹, 2004; Brender, A.², 2004; Paltridge, et al.³, 2014)

¹MacWilliams, B. Foreign students attacked in Ukraine [N]. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 2004 (36), A45.

² Brender, A.. In Japan, protection or prejudice? Government slashes number of visas issued to Chinese students

Meanwhile, as a byproduct of globalization, worsening international development problems continue to rise. Natural disasters, environmental pollution, climate change and public health, among others, are becoming more severe, and tend to go beyond borders to have an impact at the global level. The nearly 900 experts that took part in the *Global Risk Perception Survey* rated water crises, rapid and massive spread of infectious diseases, weapons of mass destruction, interstate conflict and failure of climate change adaptation as the greatest risks facing the world. If interstate conflicts and international development problems are allowed to continue, then globalization will be considered an accelerating entropy production process, leading to disorder and destruction.

Therefore, interstate conflict and international development problems are two harsh realities facing the world, requiring our joint effort from around the world to overcome the challenge.

II. Inevitable option facing the harsh realities

Interstate conflicts and international development problems can put the world in great jeopardy. Can mankind overcome prejudices in languages, cultures and even ideologies, achieve true communication and understanding, and destroy the Tower of Babel which stands for misinterpretation? Can we address challenges from global and regional environment, climate, energy,

[N]. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 2004(38), A37.

³ Paltridge Toby et al.. Welcome and exclusion: an analysis of the Australian newspaper's coverage of international students. *Higher Education*, 2014, (68), 103-116.

public health, natural disaster and regional governance problems, to ensure a future of sustainable development for future generations? The answer is certain and promising. Deepening globalization has greatly sharpened our awareness on the importance of security and sustainable development of our Only One Earth, as no country or region can keep clear of the challenges from interstate conflict and international development problems, or address them on its own.

The approach to interstate conflict and international development problems is to produce global public goods that facilitate international understanding and development. A UNDP publication in 1999 entitled *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century* defined “international public goods” as those with benefits that are strongly universal in terms of countries (covering more than one group of countries), people (accruing to several, preferably all, population groups) and generations (extending to both current and future generations, or at least meeting the needs of current generations without foreclosing development options for future generations) ⁴. International understanding and development matter to our and future generations’ welfare, and the fate of Earth also depends on their supply. Once international understanding and development are offered as international public goods, all countries have the opportunity to enjoy, and people all around the world will benefit from them. **Promoting international understanding and development are fundamental universal values, and also the inevitable**

⁴ Kaul, I., Grunberg, I. and Stern, M. (eds.) *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1999.

option, as we face these two stark realities.

III. Universities' obligation to provide global public goods

With extreme shortage of supply of global public goods⁵, universities should take up the responsibility of providing the global public goods in international understanding and development. In his book *Excellence Without A Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education*⁶, Harry R. Lewis, former Dean of Harvard College, argued universities should “retain excellence with a soul”. A university’s soul does not lie in how many scarce quasi-public goods such as status or training it can offer⁷, but in that universities are public goods in their own right, and are producing public goods including global public goods. Public goods and universities go together, just like water and fish. If universities fail to produce more public goods for the country and society, their existence loses value and meaning.

About 2,500 years ago (near the end of the Spring and Autumn Period), disciples of Confucius discussed the principles of universities in the *Great Learning* that “the principle of great learning lies in promoting our own bright virtues, helping others to become new citizens like we do, and stops only when we have reached perfection”, which offer important guidance on how universities should offer public goods. **First, public goods should demonstrate**

⁵ Kaul, I., Grunberg, I. and Stern, M. (eds.) *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1999.

⁶ Harry R. Lewis. *Excellence Without A Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education*. Public Affairs. 2006.

⁷ In public economic studies, higher learning is a public sector, which can offer public goods and quasi-public goods. The latter is a type of goods between public and private goods and has both public and private attributes.

humanitarian spirit and care. “The principle of great learning lies in promoting our own bright virtues”, as universities exist not to just disseminate knowledge, but also offer goods that demonstrate bright virtues in human nature.

Second, public goods should address social issues and crises. “(The principle of great learning lies in...) helping others to become new citizens like we do”, as universities should offer public goods not just for our own enlightenment, but also for the betterment of society. Universities are expected to be a beacon to the society, and when the society feels helpless, it looks to the universities for ray of hope and course forward. Chinese ancient scholars’ mindset of “worrying about it first before the whole world worries about it” shows their concern at higher learning level for the rest of society, and universities house the wisdom and conscience of a society.

Third, public goods should be a step ahead of times and development. Universities should be responsible for the present, but also for the future. Universities should be future-oriented, rise above present interests, and demonstrate pursuit of non-utilitarian values. The *Great Learning* also says “if one can make progress one day, then he can make progress every day, and then make even more progress every day”, and universities must constantly aim and achieve higher to last long and stay at the forefront.

Fourth, public goods should serve the overall interest of mankind as a whole. “(The principle of great learning...) stops only when we have reached perfection.” Universal values that go beyond countries and national civilizations are the ultimate good. The public goods offered by universities should not limit

themselves to benefit one country, but should have the bosom and courage to benefit all countries and regions. If universities are to maintain their value and meaning of existence, they need to shoulder responsibility for offering such public goods.

As the most international and global organization among social organizations, universities are influenced by two symbiotic relationships; today's universities provide a platform for diversified faculty, students and administrators, and diversification in turn contributes values to universities, producing unique natural advantages in facilitating mutual understanding among subjects from different cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, as an incubator of talents, innovations in knowledge, mobilization of knowledge and scientific advancements, universities can play a key role in resolving international development issues. Universities should become a conscientious participant and active organizer in global issues, and shoulder the responsibility of offering global public goods that facilitate international understanding and development.

IV. Strategy for BRICS universities to offer global public goods

BRICS countries represent different civilizations in the world, and there are commonalities and differences between these civilizations. **Universities in BRICS countries can learn from and complement each other, seek major commonalities and shelve minor differences, and join hands in cooperation**

across countries to offer a wealth of public goods aimed at enhancing international understanding and development and serve the ultimate welfare of human kind. China's *Outline of Education Plan (2010-2020)* has identified such requirements for Chinese universities, "Strengthen education on international understanding, and enhance students' knowledge and understanding of different countries and cultures", and "Strengthen cooperation with high-standard universities abroad, establish teaching and research cooperation platforms, and jointly push forward high-standard basic research and high-technology research", underlining the national level resolve for Chinese universities to promote international understanding and address international development problems.

BRICS universities should begin with top-level design, to establish long, medium and short-term cooperation plans aimed at promoting international understanding and development, and ensure the completeness and coordination in every step. First, BRICS universities should join hands to develop diversified courses, incorporate international perspectives in course teaching, provide course resources aimed at promoting international understanding and solving international problems, focus on teaching cross-culture knowledge, grasp foreign languages, improve experience in cultural exchanges, attract attention to global issues, and cultivate mutual respect and understanding between cultures. Second, BRICS universities should expand the scope trans-border experience for faculty and students. As trans-border experience is an effective way to

promote international understanding, BRICS universities can work together to offer more opportunities for faculty and students on visiting scholarships, increase exchange of personnel between BRICS countries, and accumulate experience in understanding other culture. At the same time, BRICS universities should pay attention to the contribution of international students and visiting scholars on diversification on school campus. Third, BRICS universities should engage in cross-country collaboration in research on international development problems. Different universities in BRICS have different comparative strengths in research, and for global development issues that cannot be solved by one country, localized strengths of other countries may well make up for technical bottlenecks in one country.

BRICS countries account for about 43% of world's population, and as experience in the past years has shown, BRICS serve as the engine for economic growth in the world in the future, as emerging economies and as an international organization with increasing influence. The world has placed increasingly higher expectations on BRICS to shoulder international responsibilities and obligations. **When BRICS countries focus on inclusive development⁸, and stand ready to benefit the world with their own development, participating in offering global public goods in international understanding and development is a specific example of inclusive development.** There are more than 10,000 higher learning institutes in BRICS

⁸ Asia Development Bank was the first to propose the concept of inclusive development. On April 15, 2011, China proposed the concept of inclusive development at the 2011 Annual Conference of Boao Forum for Asia, stressing social and individual development at the same time of economic development.

countries, which should, facing international conflicts and crises, **shoulder up responsibilities for the future, betterment of the world, and benefit to the mankind, and become an important platform for facilitating international understanding and solving international development problems.** When more and more universities shoulder international obligations in offering public goods in international understanding and development, BRICS countries will turn a new chapter in facilitating world development, progress and reconstruction of human civilization.