

Status and Problems of International Departments in Chinese Public Schools

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Abstract: International education in China is developing rapidly, and the current situation of the international department of public schools, a special category of international schools, is unclear and problematic. This paper analyzes the current situation and problems of the international section of public schools in China from different perspectives: the history and origins of this form of education, the cities where it is located, the quality of the student population, the content of the curriculum, the conflict between Chinese and foreign teaching methods, the conflict between learning modes, the use of learning equipment, the problems of the school management, the international section of public schools in the context of the epidemic, and the changing trends in the destination of study abroad. This paper is a comprehensive analysis of the international education system in public schools, from the perspective of students and those who have experienced it, using a variety of data and concrete analysis based on real-life situations to sort out existing problems and clarify the current situation so that it can be analyzed in greater depth.

Keywords: international department, public school, China, problems, status

1. Introduction

With the development of internationalization, the process of international education in China is also accelerating. Public school international departments stand out from the crowd of international schools in terms of schooling. At a social level, people tend to praise the international departments of public schools, which are fundamentally superior to other international teachings. With this "specialness" comes a slew of issues that aren't always obvious without firsthand experience, and the majority of which aren't implemented or addressed effectively by policy. This is also true in the academic field, where the current situation and problems of international departments in public schools have not been adequately studied. Therefore, this paper seeks to clarify the reality of international departments in public schools, the known problems and potential conflicts, and the underlying causes of the conflicts. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the current situation and problems of international departments in public schools from different perspectives: students, teachers, schools, and society.

2. Background on the International Division of Public Schools and Its Social Status

2.1. History of the International Division of Public Schools

China is experiencing an international school boom, with a total of 932 accredited international schools in mainland China as of 2021, including 243 international departments (classes) in public schools [1]. The development of international schools in China has gone through a process from scratch, from small to large. The first public school international department was established in China in 1989, and most of the international schools or public school international departments were used to solve the schooling problems of the children of embassy staff. From 1990 to 2009, the wave of study abroad grew rapidly, and as of 2009, there were 84 public school international departments throughout China [2]. Take Beijing as an example, the creation of public high international middle school classes in Beijing began around 2003. Before that, some students in some key high schools in Beijing explicitly stated that they would not take the college entrance examination and would study international courses. Since these students were good achievers and from good families, the school could not leave them alone and could not let them interfere with the normal teaching order, so they organized them into a new class, which was the prototype of the "international class".

2.2. Ranking Distribution of Cities and Data Analysis

The China International School Development Report shows that as of 2018, the number of international departments (classes) in public schools in China has reached 274 [3]. In terms of geographical distribution, international schools in mainland China are still clustered in first-tier cities. The top-ranked region is Beijing, with 29 public school international departments, including three schools with approved consent to enroll foreign students. These international departments are mainly located in Haidian District and Xicheng District [4]. In second place is Guangzhou, with 19 public international high schools and 3 private high schools, where tuition is \$200,000, \$180,000, and \$140,000 a year, with the cheapest being \$78,000 a year [5]. The third city with the highest number of international departments is Suzhou, which has the same curriculum as international schools and also takes into account the general high school curriculum; some of the schools have the same tuition as the institutional schools, with only 1700 yuan per year [6, 7]. Shanghai's public school international department is mostly at the high school level to open international courses; tuition fees are generally referred to the public high school fees, which are very cheap at 4,000 yuan a year, but the teachers are very good, so these schools are also very competitive [8]. It can be seen that the international departments of Chinese public schools show the characteristics of wide distribution and a large number and relative independence between cities.

2.3. Programs Included in the International Division of Public Schools

Public school international programs come in many forms. Many schools teach AP, IB, A-Level, and other exam-based programs, while others are co-sponsored by China and the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore, and other countries. Students in AP, IB, and A-Level programs only need to study for the exams and take them to get their college grades. Students in the International Section are required to take courses from the host country's education system. These courses mainly include ELA, STEM, and other subjects, and they have to take the provincial exams of the respective regions and take enough credits to graduate. International departments of public schools with foreign partners will require students to take some content related to the Chinese curriculum, the same content that students take for the Advanced Placement exams. This is to take the Chinese academic exams to obtain the public school diploma, which is considered a double diploma. Some schools may require

students to continue taking Chinese courses even after completing the qualifying exams to make up for the lack of credits in the foreign courses.

3. The Current State of International Departments in Public Schools

3.1. Advantages of Public School International Division

The International Division of public schools has always been a strict gatekeeper to the quality of students, mainly based on the results of the secondary school entrance examination as the selection criteria, admission has a certain degree of difficulty; students must reach the school's international class admissions score line before they may be admitted. Some schools can diversify their admissions based on students' different strengths through additional exams, and then select students on merit. The Public International Division's curriculum integrates international education concepts with high school-level education training goals. The curriculum is compatible with both Chinese and foreign teaching systems, allowing students to experience the foreign learning environment without leaving the country, and providing adequate preparation and transition for all aspects of students' mental development and cultural adaptation. Public school international programs come in many forms. Many schools use AP, IB, and A-Level exams as part of their curriculum, while others are co-sponsored by China and the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore, and other countries. Students who take exam-based courses can usually only get a diploma from the public school by taking the academic level exams, but international departments that have a Sino-foreign partnership can get a diploma from both the school itself and the location of the partner school.

3.2. Advantages for Public School Students

International departments of public schools have always been strict about the quality of students, mainly based on the results of the secondary school entrance examination as the selection criteria, admission has a certain degree of difficulty, to meet the school's international class admissions score line may be admitted. Some of the scores of international departments are even higher than the scores of some excellent ordinary high schools, and the quality of students is much higher compared to international schools that can admit at will. Students who are selected through the Chinese language examinations have a relatively solid foundation in their subjects, especially in science, and are much better than students at the same age level in international schools. These students are more test-tested, have a lot of experience preparing for all types of exams, and can achieve higher grades. However, the problem with these students is that they have not grown up in an English-speaking environment, which can be a test for their English proficiency. Most of the courses in the international section of public schools are taught in English, and these secondary school students will be lacking in listening and speaking skills. This group of students is also lacking in terms of diversity development. In their perception, the student's life is only about learning and the classroom is rather dull, which is a far cry from the foreign teacher's way of teaching. But overall, the quality of the student population is still a great advantage for further education.

3.3. Study Abroad Trends

The start of the COVID epidemic has had some impact and changed some studies in China. According to the Report on the Development of Study in China (2022), despite the economic crisis, geopolitics, and global epidemic, the number of international students has remained stable. China remains the largest source country for international students. And with the trend of destination countries opening their borders and gradually relaxing entry restrictions, and colleges and universities beginning to resume open campus and face-to-face classes, the motivation and number of students studying abroad

are set to rebound. In the long term, the U.S. will always be the number one destination country for studying abroad. In the short term, the Americas, Oceania, and Asia have seen a decline in the number of international students accepted due to the spread of the Newcastle pneumonia epidemic and changes in border and visa policies due to the changing global situation. On the contrary, the UK, France, Russia, and Germany are less affected by the epidemic, and with the successive introduction of favorable policies for Chinese students, the number of students studying abroad has increased. The UK is growing particularly fast, with the number of international students in the UK increasing to over 600,000 between 2020-2021, nearly two-thirds of the number of international students in the U.S. In 2021, the total number of mainland Chinese students applying to undergraduate programs in the UK will exceed the number of applications from all EU countries combined, while China will continue to have the highest number of applicants from countries outside the UK. The proportion of international students studying postgraduate courses is higher than the proportion of international students studying undergraduate courses, and the report speculates that under the new coronary pneumonia epidemic, underage study is returning to sanity and international students on postgraduate courses are more mobile outbound [9, 10].

4. The Conflict Between Chinese and Foreign Teaching Methods

4.1. Management Side

The majority of the management of the international department of a public school is made up of Chinese, which means that it is directly managed by the management of the general department of the public school. Foreign teachers are not very involved in the management and fundamentally, the entire international department model is still run with a Chinese mindset. This does not provide a comprehensive international education experience for the students in the International Department. The management level is more focused on whether or not the students' grades are beneficial and more focused on the students' college application results, mainly to achieve better publicity, improve the scores in the secondary school entrance exams, recruit more excellent students, and bring in more revenue. Because of this, there is a lot of formalism, so-called publicity, and useless background enhancement activities that take up students' study time and have no relevance to their foreign coursework, which can have more negative effects on students. Since expatriate teachers are small in number and not very powerful in terms of management, even if they want to propose a strategy for change, they cannot get more recognition and the implementation of the program is more difficult to guarantee.

4.2. Equipment Use and Learning Style

Since the control of the international section of the public school is still in the hands of the Chinese teachers, the use of some electronic devices and learning styles may conflict with those of foreign teachers. Foreign teachers generally teach by assigning group tasks, group work, and so on. However, Chinese teachers do not support students' group discussions and focus more on individual and independent learning. Therefore, when students are required to work in small groups after the foreign class, they are opposed by the Chinese teachers. In terms of equipment use, most of the foreign assignments and tasks are assigned by computer, but the Chinese teachers still follow the traditional paper and pencil teaching method and are relatively averse to using computers and other electronic devices for learning. These cultural and pedagogical differences are magnified in the public school context, especially when the students are taken over by the Chinese teacher after the foreign teacher leaves class. This exposes students to the consequences of competing learning methods, problem-solving patterns, and an inability to complete assignments on time and as specified.

5. Conclusion

At this point in time, there are still certain problems in the international division of public schools that often cannot be detected by the outside world through observation alone. In general, the trend of international departments in public schools is good, but the problems are still focused on these areas: on the school side, the vanity of the management, and the clash of cultures and educational systems between the Chinese and foreign sides. On the individual student side, personal development, personal level, and personal choice are the main issues. With the epidemic, the frequent cancellation of exams, and some changes in the choice of countries where students go to study abroad. These problems are real, yet little is recognized by society and little is corrected by schools and systems, which is why some of the solidified problems cannot be solved in a timely and correct manner. This can provide a basis for policy development and improvement in the international division of public schools. A more comprehensive and realistic examination of the current and developing problems of the international section of public schools is needed to more effectively identify and address the underlying issues.

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