“Three Sustainables Project”

“Society, Economy and Environment – Minorities in the Collaboration between China and Canada”

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In China, 8.4% of the population are of non-Han ethnicity (CIA World Factbook 2014), traditionally called *shǎoshù mǐnzǔ* (minority nationalities). Minority nationalities in China, like indigenous minorities around the world, face a fundamental cultural challenge: how to gain access to the benefits of the mainstream without abandoning or sacrificing what is positive, comfortable, meaningful and self-affirming in their own cultures and their identities.
Moreover, women in minority nationality communities, like women in most societies around the world, traditionally have enjoyed a smaller share of rights and benefits than the men in their communities.
From 1990 to 2001, the David Lam Centre at Simon Fraser University and the senior administration of Minzu University collaborated to address and work together to improve the situation among minority nationality communities, especially through CCULP and SULCP institutional linkages in four specific regions: Ningxia, Yunnan, Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, and Hainan.
We wanted to work with our partners to meet the research and teaching needs of the new economic and social conditions in China, to contribute to the success of the economic reforms especially in minority areas, to help local minority nationality leaders create a sound development strategy for their regions, and in general to play a more important role in the transfer of needed human resources to minority areas.
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Detailed discussion of needs revealed that we would have to compile and create new curricula and a range of teaching materials, including audio-visual and computer equipment. A central component of the plan was the provision of trained teachers to effectively utilize the new opportunities created for modernization. A training course for local level administrators was chosen as a significant part of these efforts.
Our CCULP project involved four types of exchange:

• mutual visits by Chinese and Canadian scholars, which included three young scholars from Minzu University who spent a whole semester at SFU to prepare them for teaching in the training program to be conducted jointly with scholars from SFU and Minzu in Beijing;
(2) *a study tour for senior administrators and scholars conducted by SFU to familiarize them with their Canadian counterparts;
(3) participation by SFU Faculty and graduate students in joint research programs in Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, and Yunnan; and
•(4) the joint development and joint delivery of the training course for local level cadres and teachers from local nationality institutes, which was conducted at Minzu in Beijing.

*Familiarization visits like these should not be confused with "junkets," since senior academic administrators and local government officials were held personally responsible for cooperative relationships they signed off on.
One of the main lessons we and our colleagues at Minzu learned from our CCULP experience, which contributed greatly to the success of our subsequent SULCP partnership, was that involving Chinese university administrative leaders and local government leaders in the very earliest planning stages and in initial site visits, cleared the way for smoother implementation of projects when unanticipated obstacles or opportunities arose and speedy permission was required to adapt the project to new conditions.
As Professors Hayhoe and Zha point out in their paper for this conference, Chinese universities draw on extensive networks, members of which include governments, private enterprises and community groups, which in turn can disseminate the ideas and initiatives as well as the influence far more broadly and help to forge lasting impacts.
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Thanks to the CCULP “Minority Area Development Research and Training Project,” Minzu University was able to increase its capacity to conduct teaching and research relevant to the social and economic development of minority areas through training in Canada and China, workshops, curriculum development, and development of teaching materials. The main geographic areas affected by the project were Inner Mongolia, Ningxia and Yunnan.
The goal of the “Three Sustainables” SULCP project was to provide coordinated programs in environmental protection and culturally appropriate economic development for three minority regions in China: Ningxia, Guangxi, and Hainan. The project was to achieve its goal through public information, training and research, scholarly exchanges and a pilot project aimed at specific development problems.
By the end of the SULCP project, we saw an increased capacity at Minzu and Ningxia University to conduct training in environment, culture and economy. Eight new courses attended by 630 students at Minzu and Ningxia University were developed and taught as a result of training 16 Chinese faculty and three local administrators at SFU.
More than 3,000 faculty, students and local stakeholders from Minzu and the three minority regions increased their awareness of issues relating to economic development and environmental and cultural sustainability through participation in 21 presentations involving eight Canadian scholars.
New textbooks, developed by Canadian and Chinese partners were used in new courses delivered in Beijing, Ningxia, Guangxi and Hainan.
About 40 representatives from government and academia achieved an increased understanding of the role of women in social, economic and environmental development and protection as a result of participating in the “Consultative Workshop on Women’s Roles and Contributions to Social, Economic and Environmental Development” held at Minzu University.
Eight scholars from Beijing, Guangxi, Hainan and Ningxia (five of them females) received four months of advanced study in English language and culture programs, interpretation training, international communication, resource and environmental management, and tourism policy and research.
The scholars subsequently taught eight new courses for 17 classes in environment, financial strategies, anthropology, and so on, to more than 632 students at Minzu and Ningxia University. More than 90 per cent of students at Minzu are from minority nationalities and the majority returned to their home regions to teach at all three levels of education or to work in local government.
Just one concrete example by way of followup: Professor Zhū Hǎibīng was teaching in the Tourism Department at Qiongzhou University in Tongzha, Hainan Province. She held a bachelor's degree in Political Education and had done graduate level studies in economics. She lectured on tourism in a program that had some 200 students. She was well placed to use the results of whatever training and studies she acquired in Canada to benefit her students -- many of whom were of the Li minority nationality.
Ms. Zhu studied in the Advanced Interpreter Training Program at Simon Fraser University to enhance her proficiency in English. As well, she studied under the guidance of Dr. June Francis in the Faculty of Business Administration and worked with Prof. Peter Williams in the tourism program at Simon Fraser University in 1997.
In her own words: “I became familiar with Canadian economic, cultural, environmental and other advanced scientific concepts in environmental protection; sustainable development concepts; planning in advance for tourism development; concepts of taking into account the advantages to local residents when developing plans; the need to focus on the protection of minorities and cultural diversity, etc.” [personal correspondence, December, 2013]
“While in Canada, through theory and practice as a visiting scholar, I accumulated valuable experiences in Canadian tourism development, and after returning home was able to participate in the development of the local tourism economy.” [personal correspondence, December, 2013]
Since her return to Qiongzhou University, Ms. Zhu has become: Associate Professor in the newly created Tourism Management Institute; Party Branch Secretary; and Vice-President of the Sanya Campus. Her combination of academic, administrative, and Party authority combine to make her a powerful force for enlightened development of sustainable tourism policies.
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Working together with Chinese minority nationalities in future, we must explore all options to ensure that, having proven the feasibility of modernizing their material culture through environmentally and economically sustainable development, they can make enlightened decisions regarding the “modernization” of their cultural heritage.
Modernization without homogenization is possible
Intercultural cooperation is possible and can work well if both sides believe in, and offer each other, Empathy (rén), Duty (yì), Protocol (lǐ), Knowledge (zhì), and Trust (xìn).
“Trust” is the stone placed in the middle of the other four
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Thank you for your attention!