

# Strategy to internationalise China's customs management education system

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## Abstract

Generally, colleges and other higher education institutions that offer customs management programs operate on a small scale and do so with limited domestic resources which restrict their development. Moreover, there are often only one or two institutions teaching customs-related courses in any one country, as is the situation in China, and seeking support worldwide provides a possible solution to this dilemma. Shanghai Customs College (SCC) is an integral part of the customs environment as an affiliated institute of the General Customs Administration of China and as China's provider of education specialising in customs management. With the globalisation of education, SCC decided to build an internationalised education system on the basis of its existing exchange and shared communication projects of various types. This paper explores the idea of promoting internationalised education and practice, including information about SCC's global strategy of exchange and communication efforts, and provides an outline of its forward plan to achieve these goals.

## 1. Introduction

According to data released by the World Trade Organization (WTO) Secretariat, China is ranked No. 1 in the world's cargo trade which means it represents a very large part of the global economy. To further this trend, China continues to experiment with innovative ways to expand its markets, involve more industries, and deepen its multiple levels of trade. However, to develop China's international trade and its General Customs Administration, many attributes are needed including an understanding and mastery of international rules and the interpersonal skills of multicultural communication.

Shanghai Customs College (SCC) has developed a 'Three-step Strategy' to introduce an international element in its courses since upgrading the program to bachelor's degree level. The first stage includes finding solutions to conflicts and problems that have been identified in the delivery of undergraduate education, followed by obtaining certification of the recently updated junior colleges sanctioned by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (PRC). By the end of the '13th Five-year Plan' in 2020, the aim is for SCC to be recognised as a college with a worldwide reputation for providing high-level education in accredited customs management programs. With this in mind and following extensive research, an 'Implementation Plan to Promote Internationalised Education in Shanghai Customs College' has been prepared and will be put into practice as part of the '13th Five-year Plan'.

SCC's plan to internationalise its courses accords with the conceptual idea of the World Customs Organization's (WCO) PICARD program. As the only college in China authorised to grant a bachelor's degree which includes customs management subjects, SCC must strengthen its relationships and communication with customs authorities, colleges and universities abroad to enable it to contribute to capacity building in the global customs network. Ways to develop a better understanding of the European Union's (EU) annual customs strategy are being explored to build SCC's relationship with the EU and provide opportunities for direct involvement in delivering customs-related projects.

As this paper demonstrates, SCC considers the education of customs professionals its core mission and aims to achieve this by building its teaching team to design and deliver world-class courses in collaboration with its international colleagues.

## 2. Developing an international study program

In recent years, as part of the Asia-Pacific Regional Training Center (PRC) Platform of the WCO, together with one of its member institutes, the INCU Management Committee, SCC has played a role in enhancing the ‘multiplier effect’ in conjunction with China’s ‘Talents Introduction Project’. Through international cooperation and communication a multicultural platform has been created that is beneficial for nurturing teachers and students by introducing symposiums and programs that include opportunities for training in foreign countries, teaching programs for foreign scholars, arranging international conventions for academia, and encouraging scientific research in collaboration with foreign customs experts.

### 2.1 SCC’s exchange program with Netherlands Customs

In 2013, experts from Netherlands Customs delivered two sections of international courses on ‘Customs Risk Management’ and ‘Trade Facilitation’ to SCC undergraduates, using case studies and scenario drills, and with visits to working environments. This is the first time SCC has introduced expertise from foreign customs in its undergraduate program and prompted positive feedback from students. Following this, SCC embarked on a field study and internship project to send teachers to learn and practice in an operational customs environment in conjunction with Netherlands Customs.

In 2014, building on the success of that earlier experience and in cooperation with Netherlands Customs, SCC designed the ‘International Customs Field Study and Internship Project’. A qualified teacher from the Faculty of Customs Management was selected and from 6 to 31 October, joined the Netherlands Customs Administration to participate in the project which involved a field study in management in both companies and Customs, practical experience and theoretical discussions about trade facilitation and risk management in Customs.

### 2.2 Developing the teaching module with Netherlands Customs

SCC accepts that high-level educational design of courses is essential, especially at the college level. To develop a new kind of teaching module, SCC started with a general outline of how to establish internationalised education, developed a strategic plan to achieve this and then worked on the project design in collaboration with Netherlands Customs. As a result of this approach, and unlike individual academic visits to foreign colleges and universities, the project is more in line with the development scheme at the college level.

The next stage involved exploring new areas of study and designing a variety of projects directly related to SCC’s internationalised education goals. Currently, SCC is experimenting with undergraduates from English language based programs in customs management, using the course outline and study guide compiled by customs experts for a one-month international study project. Following its successful delivery, SCC now plans to refine this international study project and offer it routinely in its undergraduate program.

As SCC considers it important for its lecturers to be part of the overall process of the project with Netherlands Customs, including its design and delivery, the Faculty of Customs Management teacher mentioned above is now assigned to act as the teaching guide on behalf of SCC. Thus several aspects of the project are advantageous to both SCC and its counterparts: direct involvement helps specialist teachers from SCC to become more efficient and benefit from access to customs management knowledge and practice in the Netherlands as well as build communication and trust between the two entities. As a

result of this approach, the 'Field Study and Internship Project with Netherlands Customs' is now part of SCC's internationalised education program.

A major element of projects of this kind is to put into practice the core idea of nurturing an understanding of foreign affairs. A variety of ways of teaching and learning are introduced into classes to enhance students' ability in multicultural communication skills including teamwork and the use of case studies and scenario drills. During the visit to Netherlands Customs, SCC encourages the lecturer to interact with domestic students through the college's official platform 'WeChat' and to microblog in the form of 'Question & Answer'. The experience of this exchange will be shared with students in lectures and in faculty meetings.

The innovative approach used to develop this project and its successful delivery provide a solid foundation for SCC to further its cooperation with EU customs authorities and other customs colleges abroad.

### **2.3 Developing curricula for international postgraduate students**

A course on international environmental taxation was designed for postgraduate students and taught, in English, by a lecturer from the Centre for Customs & Excise Studies, Charles Sturt University, Australia. The basic principles and methods of applying environmental taxes were addressed and through interactive sessions, students learnt the key areas of environmental taxation such as international environment problems, carbon pricing, the role of the Revised Kyoto Convention, and tax incentives.

### **2.4 Lectures by overseas experts**

Inviting foreign experts to lecture at SCC has become an important communication tool. American experts give cross-cultural lectures which provide students with an understanding of cultural intelligence, ways to foster effective inter-cultural communication and a platform for cultural exchange.

## **3. The next 'Five-Year Plan'**

As mentioned earlier, in the next five years SCC's aim is to gradually build a multi-level, wide-ranging mode of international communication and cooperation in higher education. The goal is to cultivate professional expertise based on applied, compound, foreign-orientated high quality education that leads to meaningful contributions to customs, foreign trade and economic cooperation. To achieve this, the following four approaches are proposed.

### **3.1 Strengthen cooperation with external customs agencies, foreign colleges and universities**

SCC is strengthening its connection with the WCO's Capacity Building Directorate and participates actively in its projects. Close connection with the EU Trade Office, the EU-China Trade Project (II) (EUCTP) is another way being used to strengthen relationships, as well as maintain contact and cooperation with colleges and members of the EU's customs institutions. It is also time to further develop SCC's role as a management committee member of the INCU Secretariat.

Meanwhile, expanding contact with customs colleges abroad and adopting characteristics of institutions such as Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands, Charles Sturt University in Australia, the University of Münster in Germany, and the University of Charleston in the US, will help to develop substantive and meaningful cooperation with SCC. It is anticipated that inviting experts from these and other colleges and universities to attend meetings and contribute to discussions about teaching programs will also contribute to SCC's internationalised courses.

### **3.2 Develop projects to build internationalised teaching faculties and provide students with a global vision**

**Field Study and Internship Project.** Undertaking projects in conjunction with foreign customs agencies, businesses involved in customs services, and professional associations will serve to further develop effective teaching tools as well as improve the faculties' understanding of foreign customs theory and practice and contribute to an international customs vision.

**The Internationalised Course System Building Project.** The focus of this project is to develop an internationally recognised customs course. Certification of SCC's customs course by the WCO is, therefore, of vital importance. Attention must be given to keeping in contact with the relevant departments of the WCO, and to promoting participation in SCC's customs course to meet the certification requirements in respect of teaching and assessment criteria. A foreign customs lecture series is essential and involves designing a comprehensive lecture plan and inviting foreign customs specialists to deliver those lectures. Following the success of the Netherlands Customs' international course, SCC is now able to choose one or two developed countries to assist in building its program.

### **3.3 Promote wider training opportunities**

SCC attaches great importance to cooperating with the Asian Development Bank and other organisations to undertake training programs that include foreign elements. The successful creation of the 'Customs Center of Excellence in the Asia-Pacific Region' provides the necessary foundation needed to promote foreign training and close cooperation with the WCO and the Capacity Building Directorate in the Asia-Pacific Regional Office (ROCB) assists this process. Other important tasks are the cultivation of Customs-Business relationships and the need for expertise in foreign language teaching. Meanwhile, SCC needs to find ways to recruit experts with WCO certification in China's customs system.

Developing a foreign-orientated training brand will help build the worldwide reputation of SCC. To achieve this, it may be necessary to make full use of the Customs Cooperation Fund (China) established by China Customs in the WCO. To meet the requirements of international cooperation, new themes and multilateral or bilateral training programs funded by China Customs need to be available. SCC will continue to play a role in industries and disciplines to undertake foreign aid training programs which, with the Ministry of Commerce's endorsement, has the theme 'Capacity Building of Customs'. Promoting the upgrading and transformation of Hong Kong and Macau customs training programs will be the next step.

### **3.4 Promote academic research and development**

To effectively build scientific research teams, it will be necessary to encourage and guide research by lecturers and teachers that focuses on international customs knowledge and practice and includes opportunities for exchange programs to enable in-depth investigation of the operation of customs administration in different countries. Lecturers and teachers will also need to be encouraged and supported to participate in international customs research meetings, such as the WCO's PICARD conferences and Regional Training Centre meetings, INCU Global Conferences, the Ukraine international science conferences, and other international academic customs conferences. This will strengthen the building of an international customs information centre, including those of the WCO and WTO, and expand the sharing of data of key trading partners of China Customs.

## 4. Conclusions

SCC is committed to offering a comprehensive education system with strong international links. To achieve this, SCC plans to put in place all supporting mechanisms required to:

- build and maintain close working relationships with customs departments in China
- develop innovative ways to strengthen cooperation and communication with business and international organisations such as the WCO and INCU
- continue working with overseas customs authorities, colleges and universities to design case studies and projects that reflect current-day customs service and practice
- foster opportunities for teacher/lecturer exchange programs at foreign colleges and universities
- develop a system to evaluate projects and courses to ensure national certification and international accreditation
- participate in programs to contribute to capacity building and customs reform in the PRC and worldwide by collaborating with foreign customs authorities.

By implementing these approaches to customs management education in the PRC, SCC will fulfil its mission as the subordinate college of the General Customs Administration of China.

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## Note

- 1 This paper is based on the author's presentation, 'Internationalized strategy of exchange and communication in Shanghai Customs College', at the EU-China Seminar on Customs Professional Training and Capacity Building (EU-China Trade Project II), 24-25 November 2014, Shanghai.

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Dr Tong Hua is the Policy Research secretary and foreign affairs coordinator of the President's Office in Shanghai Customs College (SCC). He is also a member of China Customs Academic Association and an assistant researcher. He was awarded his PhD in Pedagogy by East China Normal University. Tong Hua's research is focused mainly on customs higher education and capacity building, and the strategies of different nations to develop effective and efficient customs management. He has published many research papers and taken part in PICARD and other WCO projects. Over the past few years, Tong Hua has drafted documents, such as strategies for the National Conference of Customs Regional Directors, and submitted more than 40 proposals for ministerial decisions. From 2011 to 2013, he was a member of the committee responsible for building the Research Center of the General Customs Administration of China. He has taken part in scientific research programs at ministerial level including 'The New Development Trend of International Customs within the Framework of Trade Facilitation and Safety', 'The Comparative Research of Customs Institutes of Different Nations', and 'The Customs Development Strategy in the New Era'.