

# Modern University System: A Culture That Helps the Benign Operation of Universities

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## ABSTRACT

According to the British biologist and educator E. Ashby, universities are the products of inheritance and the environment. Lovell, the former president of Harvard University, added that universities have existed for longer than any form of human organization. Is the long-term existence of the university in the history of human civilization the result of the environment or the result of inheritance? If university is the product of the environment, there is no doubt that it cannot compare with "any form of government"; if university is only the product of heredity, it should be the same at anytime and anywhere, without differences in "time distance" or "regional distance". Viewing the history, universities in the reality do not operate like this. The only reason is that inheritance is the main aspect of university change, and environment is the second important aspect. Cultural tradition is its gene, and its survival age is its condition. Therefore, all the universities, especially the newly-built local undergraduate universities, take the establishment of modern university system as the premise of survival and development. And this university system is a culture for the benign operation of universities.

**Keywords:** Modern university system, Organization, System, Culture, New-built local undergraduate universities.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Lowell, former president of Harvard University, once said, "universities have existed longer than any form of government, any tradition, legal change and scientific thought, and they meet people's eternal needs. Among all kinds of human creation, nothing can withstand the long-time test swallowing everything more than university." [1] At the same time, E. Ashby, a British biologist and educator, believes that "universities are institutions that inherit western culture. Universities preserve, disseminate and enrich human culture. And they have been evolving like animals and plants. All universities are the products of inheritance and environment." [2] It can be seen that only one thing that can make the university experience the long-time test and surpass any form of human organization is "inheritance", that is, to maintain the cultural tradition of the universities. The core of university cultural tradition is the modern university system.

## 2. ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEM AND CULTURE

"Modern university system" focuses on the system first. What is definition of "system"? What does the "system" contain? What can "system" be used for? It is necessary to clarify this problem first. In other words, researchers need to define this problem first, and then think and discuss it within this philosophical framework. In the theoretical circle, there are many forms and contents about the system. Early sociologists such as Webber believed that the system is mainly a normative structure, which provides a basic moral framework for organizational life. W. Richard Scott, a scholar of modern organization theory, believes that "system includes regulatory, normative and cultural cognitive elements that provide stability and significance for social life, as well as related activities and resources." [3] The regulation of the system requires that the stakeholders of the system must abide by the system requirements and cannot violate the system. Therefore, the regulation of the system means the compulsory role of the system.

The standardization of the system requires that the executor must carry out operation according to the procedures and scales in the system. The standardization of the system means the standardization of action. The cultural cognitive element of the system requires the system to play a leading and educational role on the covered, and prompts the system followers to recognize the nature and requirements of the organization through the system. The regulation, standardization and culture cognition of the system show that the system is the result of the public rationality of the organization, which connotes the attribute, goal and path of the organization. And then, a specific organizational culture can be created. Obviously, the organization's system is the conduct code and norms jointly observed by the members of the organization, and should be a self-conscious thing. In other words, if every organization member has a specific understanding on organization and practices the specific behavior of the organization, it doesn't matter whether the system exists or not. According to this, the system is dispensable, and the system can be explicit or invisible. Broadly speaking, the system is used to create a culture in line with the interests of the organization.

There is no doubt that system is always related to organization. Without organization, there will be no system. W. Richard Scott, an American scholar, summarized various views on a series of issues, such as the role of the system on the organization, the reasons why the organization needs the system, and the relationship between the two parties. According to the first view, "institutions provide game rules, and organizations are actors similar to players". According to the second view, "the organization, structure and procedures are systems themselves, and the organization as an institution is a system designed to govern production activities and minimize transaction costs". The third view holds that "modern organization is also an institutional form to a large extent", "emphasizing the relationship between the process at the social (or even international) level and the structure and operation of a single organization, and opposing the distinction between the organization and its institutional environment" [4]. From these three views, the relationship between "system" and "organization" can be judged, and there is a phenomenon of integration in cognition, that is, with regard to the relationship between organization and system, it is increasingly believed that organization is system and system is organization. The first view shows that system is

the support of organization; The second view holds that organization is a kind of systems; The third view "opposes" to make a distinction between the system and the organization. The "integration" of organization and system is not only a theoretical understanding, but also reflects the practical process of organization and system. If organizations and systems are expressed separately, what is the intermediary between organizations and institutions? There is no doubt that the intermediary of organization and system is human. People, the people in the organization, are the connection point of organization and system. If the organization has a purpose, people in the organization are the core productivity elements of the organization. If systems are norms formulated for organizational purposes, people are the implementers and operators of these norms. "Organization is a social entity with guiding objectives and carefully constructed. The reason why an organization is a social entity is that it is composed of two or more people. According to the definition, this entity is goal-oriented, that is, people are organized together to obtain a specific result." [5] Obviously, people act for the purpose of the organization, and the behavior made by people must serve the purpose of the organization. Therefore, the system is used to regulate the behavior of people in the organization, including the purpose of the behavior, the morality contained in the behavior and the value contained in the behavior. Purpose, morality, value and so on have become the organizational culture in the process of operation. Therefore, system and organization are in the "integration", and system is the culture of organization.

### **3. MODERN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM AND UNIVERSITY CULTURE**

The emergence process of "modern university system" just reflects the above characteristics of "system". "Modern university system" is put forward and emphasized when there is a phenomenon contrary to the organizational attribute of the university in the operation process. This can be seen from the frequency of the word "modern university system" in the theoretical literature.

The concept of "modern university system" was very popular in China's higher education circles, especially in the theoretical circles around 2010. Now it seems that it is mainly due to two reasons. First, the administration of colleges and universities has been strengthened by some policies. For example, during this period, universities of "Project

985" and "Project 211" implemented policies, and universities of "Project 985" enjoyed vice-ministerial treatment. This policy has strengthened the administrative level of colleges and universities and contributed to the trend of administration in colleges and universities. Second, China's higher education has rapidly entered the stage of popularization. The development of a large number of newly-built local undergraduate colleges and universities has entered a confused period. Since China's enrollment expansion in 1998, many newly-built undergraduate colleges and universities appeared in 2010, which leads to these colleges and universities confused in the management process. It has become a common phenomenon to manage universities with the thinking of normal training college and even secondary normal colleges. The

contradiction between the expectations of theorists and Society for higher education and the educational reality provided by colleges and universities makes the theoretical circle begin to reflect. In the final analysis, these two reasons are the problems existing in construction of "modern university system". This can be seen through the annual statistics of the amount of literature. With "modern university system" as the keyword, a total of 4331 documents were obtained on the CNKI. The specific annual distribution of documents is shown in "Figure 1" below. As can be seen from "Figure 1", the research on the theme of "modern university system" mainly focused on the surge from 2010 to 2018, reaching the highest value in 2014.

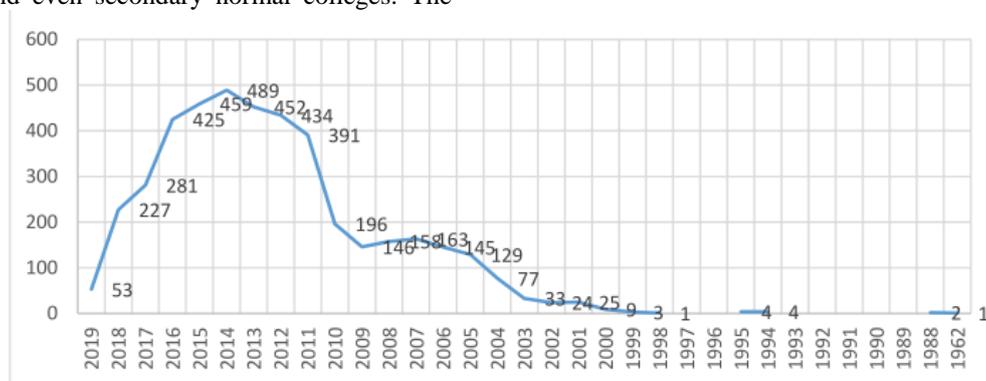


Figure 1 Annual statistics of subject literature of "Modern university system".

As can be seen from the curve, the theoretical circles' attention to "modern university system" gradually increased from 391 papers in 2010 to 489 papers in 2014, and then began to fall back to 227 papers in 2018. It can also be seen from "Figure 1" that before 1999, the number of research literature on "modern university system" was in single digits, while in 2000, it suddenly increased from 9 in 1999 (only 4 in a year to the maximum extent) to 25 in 2000. This is also the result of the development of higher education practice.

As human beings know, China's higher education has now entered the stage of "popularization". From 1998 to 1999, great changes have taken place in policies and guidelines, changing from steady development to rapid expansion. In 1999, the State Council issued the "Action plan for revitalizing education in the 21st century", and announced the full implementation of the enrollment expansion policy of higher education, marking the beginning of the popularization of higher education in China." [6] Therefore, it can be said that the popularization of

higher education started around 1999, which launched a large-scale activity of upgrading from junior college to undergraduate and opened the "movement" of higher education popularization of "upgrading from technical secondary school to junior college" and "upgrading from junior college to undergraduate". Logically speaking, "popularization" should have several characteristics. First, it represents a process; Second, it is usually expressed by a specific ratio; Third, it means that it is a natural result of the internal development of things. The development of everything has a process. When human beings believe that it is "a process", this process has an important influence on the result. Without emphasizing this process, it is not enough to explain the value and significance of the result. In China, the popularization of higher education is obviously a process. Taking the list of colleges and universities published by the Ministry of Education on June 15, 2019 as an example, according to this data, the total number of undergraduate colleges and universities in China's higher education system is 1264 and the total

number of junior colleges is 1424. Undoubtedly, these 1264 undergraduate universities and 1424 junior colleges cannot be established in a certain year. They have been gradually upgraded over the years. Therefore, if China's higher education has been popularized today, this popularization has evolved in a process. It is necessary for the popularization of higher education to reach a ratio, which was put forward by Martin Trow, the scholar who first put forward the concept of "popularization of higher education". The ratio he gave is 15%. When a country's gross enrollment rate of higher education reaches 15%, the country's higher education has entered the stage of popularization. According to this, "in 2002, the gross enrollment rate of China's higher education reached 15% for the first time, indicating that China has entered the stage of popularization of higher education claimed by Martin Trow. Since then, popularization has become the main melody of the development of higher education in China. In 2016, the gross enrollment rate of China's higher education reached 42.7%. The officials forecast that China's higher education will enter the popularization stage in 2019, that is, the gross enrollment rate of higher education will exceed 50%." [7] It can be seen that China has entered the popularization stage in the sense of Martin Trow as early as 2002.

Is the popularization of higher education in China a natural result of the internal development of higher education? To answer this question, people must first return to the theory of "popularization of higher education". Is the concept of "popularization of higher education" a summary of historical states or a revelation of the laws of the development of higher education? If it is the former, it is necessary to study the internal factors of the development of higher education; If it is the latter, it is necessary to find out what the internal conditions of this law are. Some scholars believe that [8] the concept and theory of "popularization of higher education" are derived from Martin Trow's concept of "mass higher education", and the concept of "mass higher education" first appeared in his book "democratization of American higher education" published in 1962, and then was improved in his book "problems in the transformation from elite education to mass higher education" published in 1973. There is also a view holding that Chinese and Japanese scholars have changed "mass higher education" into "popularization of higher education" in the process of interpretation. Martin Trow did not take "popularization of higher education" as the core concept in his theory, but

adopted "mass higher education". The two reasons are as follows. First, the concept of "mass higher education" originates from the coherence of concepts such as "mass education" and "mass middle school education". Second, the concept of "popularization" was criticized in the United States at that time. It can be seen that "popularization of higher education" is not a ready-made "foreign product", and naturally does not have a complete theoretical system. For China's higher education, the author believes that the emergence of the concept of "popularization of higher education" is completely the result of China's current higher education policy. According to Mr. Zhang Jilong's review of the concept of "popularization of higher education", the "popularization of higher education" comes from "mass higher education", and the "mass higher education" follows the "mass middle school education" and inherits the "mass education" in the United States. Obviously, the idea of "mass higher education" is related to basic education. Martin Trow's "mass higher education" first came from his "Democratization of American higher education" in 1962. The year of 1962 has special significance for American basic education. In 1957, the Soviet Union sent the world's first man-made satellite into space. This event of human significance shocked the United States. The United States believed that the reason why the Soviet Union took the lead in the space race was that Soviet engineers were excellent mathematicians. Therefore, the United States reformed education to strengthen people's scientific education and mathematical ability, so as to deal with the threat of Soviet scientific and technological talents. Since 1960, the United States has launched the reform of mathematics education in middle school, which was known as the "new mathematics movement". So far, the ideas and concepts of "mathematics for all" and "mass education" have appeared in American basic education. Why does "mass education" appear in basic education? Originally, it hopes that everyone can receive education, everyone can receive good education, everyone can understand mathematics, and then the scientific literacy of all citizens can be improved. Martin Trow put forward "mass higher education" with this logic, which is also consistent with this view. The concept was put forward in his book "democratization of American higher education" for the first time, showing his intention. With the concept of "mass higher education", Martin Trow criticized the "traditionalists", "traditional expansionists" and "elitist reformers" that were popular in American higher education at that time. In his opinion, "the views of elitists" are

"incompatible with democratic views", "the views of elitists will threaten" the opportunities provided for rebuilding and strengthening high-level education ", and "the views of higher education expansionists" reflect and affect the growth and development of higher education". And it is necessary to vigorously advocate to "transform the traditional elite higher education into a larger, more democratic and socially adaptable mass higher education composed of more components" [9]. Therefore, the proposal of "popularization of higher education" originates from the purpose of politics, that is, the purpose of democracy. As a special field (non-political special field), it sets the goal outside the field, making the theory in this field have many shortcomings and deficiencies. And then, it is difficult to guide the development of theory and practice in this field. Therefore, Martin Trow's theory of "popularization of higher education" is one-sided. In this regard, Martin Trow himself admitted in a conference paper report in 1978: "my hypothetical prediction that the development of European higher education system will also follow the development model of American mass higher education is now proved to be an obvious error by the development process of European Higher Education since 1973." [10]. According to other researchers, Martin Trow used 15% and 50% gross enrollment rate to define the popularization stage of higher education, "making people or even Martin Trow... increase the sense of mystery about the figures of 15% and 50%" [11]. It is indisputable that the theory of "popularization of higher education" is a summary of the historical facts of the development of higher education and only shows a state of the development of higher education. If this theory is used as a practical guidance, it may be misleading. It can simply imagine that if people only rely on the satisfaction of the external needs of higher education to realize the popularization of higher education, what will be the final result of the development of higher education? Inevitably, higher education is only a kind of post-high school education. If higher education defines the popularization of higher education only with the gross enrollment rate of 15%, what is the purpose of the popularization of higher education? Inevitably, higher education is only a form of school education. The development of higher education should have its own law, and also have the laws suitable for the development of social and economic structure. Maintaining a tension between its own internal development and external conditions is the premise of the development of higher education. Without tension,

higher education will become its opposite only with the external forces. Without tension, higher education will become out of society only with the internal force. The popularization of higher education should not only conform to the law of higher education, especially the law of quality, but also to the law of social and economic development, especially the law adapted to social economy. In theory and practice, what is the result of the popularization of higher education in China? When schools upgrade, students no longer need to cross the single wooden bridge and can go to college. The selection function of education is weakened. As a result, some students go to vocational middle schools to study and then find employment after graduation from university. What the society is facing is that on the one hand, enterprises need a lot of people; on the other hand, a large number of college graduates can't find jobs... "People's Daily" criticizes sleeping college students: it's unreasonable for you not to lose your job". [12] Homogenization of universities can be found everywhere. In addition to allowing people who want to go to college, what is any else purpose of the popularization of higher education? Is university still the university? Are university students still university students? Obviously, the popularization of higher education in China is not caused by the internal law of higher education, nor by the characteristics of the stage of social and economic development. The current situation and results of the popularization of higher education need to be seriously reconsidered by the theoretical and practical circles of higher education.

Since 1999, with the help of Martin Trow's incomplete or even wrong theory of "popularization of higher education", China's higher education has met the desire and requirements of the whole society for entering universities at that time, and started the movement of higher education enrollment expansion and school upgrading. On the other hand, due to the lack of theoretical basis, the development of colleges and universities and the quality of talent training has not been improved accordingly. These two reasons make the theoretical circle of higher education show a practical desire for "modern university system". Just like this, the researches on "modern university system" have sprung up after 2000, and reached the peak of theoretical thinking in 2014. With 15 years of theory and practice in this direction, the theoretical efforts made have not changed much in practice before 2014. After enrollment expansion, each newly-built local undergraduate university

established still "goes its own way" due to various practical factors and "walks" towards a standardized and quality-oriented university according to its own conditions. In 2011, the Ministry of Education issued the "Interim measures for the formulation of the articles of association of colleges and universities", requiring all colleges and universities to formulate their own university articles of association. This actually means that in practice, colleges and universities have established a modern university system. As stated in Article 1 of Chapter 1 of the "Interim Measures for the formulation of the articles of association of colleges and universities", "these measures are formulated in accordance with the education law, the higher education law and other relevant provisions in order to improve the modern university system with Chinese characteristics, guide and standardize the construction of the articles of association of colleges and universities, and promote the management and scientific development of colleges and universities according to law." Theoretically, it can be considered that the "modern university system" of colleges and universities in China has been implemented at the legal level. In other words, if some universities still do not carry out talent training, scientific research and social services in accordance with the modern university system, it can only show that these universities do not act in accordance with the modern university system. Theoretically, the heat of "modern university system" has been reduced. Fundamentally speaking, education is a practical activity, which is "done" rather than "discussion". Paying attention to the practice of "modern university system" is more important than theoretical thinking.

What is the essence of "modern university system"? Modern university system, as a kind of university systems, "is a university regulation system based on academic essence to determine the survival and development of college students. In terms of internal and external relations, it can be divided into external system and internal system; In terms of the expression form, it can be divided into written system and unwritten system; In terms of the content dimension, it can be divided into organization setting system, management system, work system, etc." These systems can be divided into basic systems and specific systems. The basic system is the principle or framework of the most basic contents such as the nature, tasks, organizational composition and main activities of the university, and it is the basis for the formulation of various specific systems. The specific system is

the expansion or concretization of the basic system." [13] It can be seen that the "modern university system" is not derived from the constraints outside the university, but from the reflection of the university itself. Also, it is the university itself that clarifies the boundary with the other, so as to prevent the university from going to the different side. At the same time, universities would clean up the "house" and sort out their own things, throw out the things with "alien power" that are "infected" by the process of "secularization", and set up a "fence" for this purpose. This "fence" is the "modern university system", which is the culture necessary for the university to ensure the purity of its "gene" in the process of dealing with the secular world.

#### **4. ESTABLISHMENT OF SYSTEM IN NEWLY-BUILT LOCAL UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITIES**

Literally, human beings can know from the newly-built local undergraduate colleges and universities that they are upgraded from non-undergraduate colleges and universities. There are two key words, namely, "newly-built" and "local". In China, the word "newly-built" means its deficiency and lack of university culture. And the word "local" includes two aspects of meanings. On the one hand, it is generally located in prefecture (most of which are non-provincial capital cities), and the urban cultural taste is not high. On the other hand, it can receive little financial support. These two key words represent the two characteristics of this kind of universities.

In the world, the "newly-built" university does not necessarily lack university culture. For example, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology has been established for about 30 years, but it has become a world-famous university and one of the best in Asia. If Hong Kong University of Science and Technology had no university culture, it would not have achieved such academic recognition, which should be attributed to the direct relationship between the recruitment of famous experts and scholars around the world by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology at the beginning of its establishment. Therefore, it can be seen that the "newly-built" is not a natural factor affecting university culture. Culture should be humanized in essence. Therefore, if one university has such people who have been universalized, even if it is "newly built", it will not affect the university

to be a university. TU University in Jiangsu Province is the best example. TU University is a newly-built local undergraduate university, which is upgraded based on the original "secondary normal college" or "higher normal college". University teachers are the original staff of "secondary normal college" or "higher normal college". They have not received the full baptism of university culture. Most of them use the original thinking mode and behavior mode to manage and teach in the process of running a university. The so-called original mode of thinking and behavior is habit. Habit has an advantage in people's life and work process, that is, people can work without thinking in life or work process, which would reduce a lot of "efforts". And then, work is labor-saving and worry-saving, and it is what people most desire in life and work. After the establishment of a new enterprise and assembly line, managers and workers often hope that they can quickly form working habits, which can reduce mental investment, reduce redundant behavior and ensure product quality. This is the advantage of "habit". For teachers who undertake "secondary normal college" or "higher normal college", the newly-built local undergraduate colleges and universities should ask them to have university culture. Obviously, these original staff should abandon their existing habits and transform them with new thinking and behavior patterns, so as to form new thinking and behavior that meet the requirements of the university. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the ideological transformation of teaching staff in order to establish a modern university system. With the use of "ideological transformation", such as ideological discussion, teachers can "brainwash", abandon habits, change ideas and behavior. This is the direction that managers must strive for.

"Locality" will inevitably lead to the inextricable connection between the teaching staff of newly-built undergraduate colleges and universities and the society and its secular culture, which are easy to be infected by secular culture. The "locality" also leads to the limited financial support for newly-built undergraduate colleges and universities, which puts great pressure on its development and even survival. In the elite education stage of higher education of China, few universities are set up in a prefecture city. Even if universities are set up in a prefecture-level city (for example, QFNU in Shandong Province, which is located in Qufu City, a county-level city), its finance comes from the provincial finance. At the

same time, the finance of such universities comes from the central government. Therefore, even if university is located in prefecture-level cities or even county-level cities, the finance of a university will not have problems and can basically meet the needs of university development. With the development of social economy, technology affects all walks of life. Of course, it also deeply affects the development of universities, and "oppresses" the development of newly-built local universities. Due to the popularization of higher education (it has probably reached the stage of popularization in Jiangsu Province), Chinese higher education has shown the phenomenon as the president of Fordham University worried in 1948, "a large increase in university enrollment will lead to 'education expansion'. Paying a large number of mediocre students to remit them into the higher education can only lead to the depreciation of higher education, which led to an academic Gresham's law." "The phenomenon of 'bad money expelling good money' in economics" can be seen [14]. It is afraid that the students enrolled in the newly-built local universities are the "bad money" referred to by the president of Fordham University. (Of course, according to the pedagogy, this statement is wrong and does not conform to the spirit of pedagogy.) If the students like "bad money" want to develop, they need more investment, whether in funds or teachers' manpower, and also more financial investment is needed. This leads to a "financial paradox of newly-built local universities", that is, on the one hand, the newly-built local universities recruit some students who need more investment; on the other hand, the newly-built local universities do not have the support of central finance and provincial finance, and only have prefecture-level financial investment. The Matthew effect of "letting others have more" plays a role in China's higher education both macroscopically and microscopically.

No matter how many qualifiers are in front of the word "university", the connotation and legal obligations of "university" cannot be changed. In the field of higher education and higher education evaluation, there is a popular word called OBE, which often appears in undergraduate teaching and professional evaluation, that is, outcomes-based education (abbreviated as OBE). This evaluation model is a self-subjective evaluation, which suspends the objective standard of higher education quality and solves the "paradox" of the development of newly-built local undergraduate colleges and universities. This is also a "helpless"

choice for the popularization of higher education. However, the "outcomes" only shows the contribution of newly-built local undergraduate colleges and universities in the four years of talent training. However, the precondition of "outcomes" is still "university" and "undergraduate education", which is an insurmountable macro framework. It is this macro framework of "university" and "undergraduate education" that lays the theoretical and practical premise for the implementation of modern university system construction in newly-built local undergraduate colleges and universities.

The purpose of carrying out the construction of modern university system in newly-built local undergraduate universities is to make such universities more like a university. With the use of the modern university system containing university genes, it can regulate the management anomie caused by the short university history, shallow university culture and lack of university thought. With poor finance, poor students and poor teachers, the normalization of management is a necessary prerequisite for the benign operation of "newly-built local undergraduate universities" as a university. Viewing TU University, in order to establish a modern university system, it is required to focus on the following aspects. First, it is necessary to strengthen the discussion of higher education thought. On the one hand, it is suggested to eliminate the original ideas and consciousness of non-undergraduate colleges and universities such as technical secondary schools and colleges. On the other hand, it is better to cause ideological collision and let the higher education ideas take root among managers and teachers. Second, it is suggested to establish a modern university system. All organizations should have a system. Without a system, there will be no organization. Newly-built local undergraduate universities, as universities, should have set up corresponding systems and strictly implement these systems. In this way, the university can really come into being and the university spirit can really appear in the newly-built local undergraduate universities. However, the system formulated should reflect the spirit of the university. The system that does not conform to the spirit of the university can not help the newly-built local undergraduate university to become a real university, but also harm the development of the newly-built local undergraduate universities. TU University has also issued many documents and systems, but these documents have two "traps" against the spirit of the university. First, many documents have "back doors" due to fear that

personal interests cannot be guaranteed or personal thinking defects, which seriously hurts the standardization and seriousness of documents in the process of implementation. Second, the secularization of the specific operators of formulating documents is serious, which leads to the establishment of documents or systems based on X theory, and in turn imprisons the release of university spirit. X theory, as an enterprise management theory, may have certain effectiveness, but as a university management theory, it may be wrong or even harmful. Third, it is required to strictly implement the system. Unexpected phenomena and even mistakes may occur at the beginning of implementing the system, which is inevitable. However, the implementation should be strict. Even if the system has defects, it should be strictly implemented. It cannot be changed day and night. It can be revised once every three years. It also reminds human beings that in the process of formulating the system, it is necessary to fully respect the opinions of some experts and scholars and try to let them participate, especially the professors introduced abroad. After all, they have experienced the development process of a university and have certain experience.

## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

This paper is independently completed by Xiaomin Sun.

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