

Opportunities and Challenges: Exploring the Path of High-Quality Development of Private Universities in the New Era

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ABSTRACT

As an integral part of China's higher education system, private colleges and universities occupy an important position in China's higher education. With the implementation of the college expansion policy and the gradual deepening of school operations, the problems of private colleges and universities gradually appear. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the state has continuously introduced policies and measures to promote the development of private colleges and universities and the high-quality development of private colleges and universities. In today's new era, there are opportunities and challenges for the implementation of high-quality development in private colleges and universities, which should explore new paths of high-quality development in cultivating specialties, strengthening social cooperation, promoting the transformation of scientific research achievements, strengthening the construction of faculty, and upholding the value of university spirit.

Keywords: private universities; opportunities and challenges; high quality; development paths.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The background

Private colleges and universities in my country started as short-term self-examination tutorial classes in the 1980s. They went through the diploma exams and established their own independent school buildings, teaching facilities, and faculty. Other forces joined in cooperation with public colleges and universities, and finally got promoted. Enter the unified recruitment sequence for higher education enrollment. Since 1999, with the rapid increase in society's demand for education and the implementation of my country's higher education expansion policy, private colleges and universities have developed rapidly and have become an important part of my country's higher education.

In 2006, the Ministry of Education issued "Several Opinions on Improving the Quality of Higher Vocational Education and Teaching". In December of the same year, the General Office of the State Council issued the "Notice on Strengthening the Standardized Management of Private Universities and Guiding the Healthy

Development of Higher Education", requiring private universities to appropriately control the number of students enrolled, thereby promoting the high-quality development of the school. In July 2010, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council promulgated the "National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)", which clarified the goal of improving the quality of private colleges and universities. The policy of approving high-level and high-quality colleges and universities has pushed private colleges and universities to a new stage of development. The National Education Conference held on September 10, 2018 clearly pointed out that talent training is the core task of education and teaching, and talent quality is the core content of education and teaching evaluation. The quality of talent training and the relevant conditions to achieve the quality of talent training have become the goal of the connotative development of higher education. With the deepening of the popularization of higher education, high-quality development, cultural development, and scientific development will surely become the banner of university development.

1.2. The inevitability of the high quality development of private colleges and universities

High-quality development is a new expression first proposed in the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. This expression indicates that China's economy will shift from a stage of rapid development to a stage of high-quality development. At the same time, high-quality development is a distinctive feature of Chinese education in the new era, and it is also a new historical positioning of Chinese education in the new era. In the context of double first-class construction, the concept of "quality" for breakthroughs and "quality" for development has been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. High quality is not only the way of development pursuit, but also the result of development pursuit. However, different types and different levels of colleges and universities have different development positions and external environments, and their high-quality development connotations are also different. Private colleges and universities are higher education institutions that are organized for society with the goal of cultivating talents and use non-state financial education funds. Private colleges and universities have played a great role in alleviating the shortage of higher education resources, satisfying people's desire for higher education, and, to a certain extent, promoting healthy competition among higher education institutions. Due to many problems, such as a short history of running schools, shallow discipline accumulation, limited capital investment, insufficient teaching staff, etc., the quality of running schools and the quality of talent training are generally not high in private universities. Compared with public universities, especially key public universities, the training of talent is weak. To some extent, private colleges and universities are the main factors diluting the quality of my country's higher education. Therefore, it is the expectation of the government, industry, enterprises, and young students to strengthen the connotation construction of private universities, improve the quality of education and talent training, and cultivate the high-quality talents needed by society.

2.OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

2.1. The concept of "accelerating the construction of first-class universities"

The victory of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China marked the beginning of a new stage of development for socialism with Chinese characteristics. "Accelerating the construction of first-class universities and first-class disciplines and realizing the connotative development of higher education"^[1] is a new requirement for higher education in the report of the

19th National Congress. This requirement not only points out the direction for the development of higher education in our country, but also marks the high-quality development stage of higher education in our country. China is making unremitting efforts to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The key to achieving the great rejuvenation depends on talents. The cultivation of talents needs education, especially higher education, to provide strong support. Efforts to create a large number of young scientific and technological talents with a sense of innovation and strategic leaders at an international level is the goal and responsibility of higher education, as well as the mission of private universities.

2.2. Social development puts new demands on talent training

Nowadays, the rapid development of society has put forward new requirements on people's knowledge and ability levels, which is the source of motivation for the high-quality development of private colleges and universities. Recently, the implementation of policies such as the full liberalization of the "three children" and supply-side structural reforms has caused society's demand for higher education to continue to increase. People's desire to receive high-quality higher education continues to stimulate the development of higher education in a high-quality and high-quality direction. However, at present, the overall level of development of quality higher education in China cannot fully meet the good wishes of the people, cannot adapt to the urgent requirements of the country to improve its comprehensive strength and international competitiveness, and cannot adapt to the needs of building a strong socialist modern country. As an important supporter and promoter of the cause of higher education in China, and as an important force in realizing the popularization of higher education, private colleges and universities in China must take up the requirements of high-quality talent cultivation.

2.3. Policy support from national and local governments

Since 2012, China's education expenditure has continuously accounted for more than 4% of GDP, and the "Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for National Education Development" promulgated by the State Council in 2017 clearly stipulates that education will be the focus of government financial expenditure at all levels and will be given priority protection. On April 7, 2021, the revised "Regulations for the Implementation of the Private Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China" was announced. The regulations clearly stated the government's support and reward policies for private education, and provided institutional guarantees for the development of private universities. The support of the state and local governments for private colleges and

universities is mainly manifested in the financial investment, allocation of land and tax exemptions for private colleges and universities. The development of private colleges and universities in terms of actions is being supported by the state practically, which will inject sustainable development momentum for the high-quality development of private colleges and universities.

3. CHALLENGES TO THE QUALITY DEVELOPMENT OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

3.1. Vague positioning of schooling and serious homogenization

Most private colleges and universities have blurred their own orientations, and there is no difference between them and public colleges and universities in terms of professional settings and schooling philosophy. They have lost their uniqueness, and the private colleges and universities that should have specialties as their biggest advantage are just "seeking the same." Private colleges and universities, which should take specialties as their greatest advantage, are only seeking the same, blindly setting popular majors, pursuing the breadth of majors, and emphasizing comprehensive schooling. Although this has increased the number of majors set up in colleges and universities, it has also weakened the characteristics of schools. With regard to the setting of emerging majors, private colleges and universities have greater flexibility and can quickly respond to market demands. However, due to the low threshold of these majors, more and more private colleges are keeping up with market changes, and the phenomenon of professional convergence continues to intensify. This phenomenon is prone to over-training of talents, which makes the high-quality majors of universities squeeze out of resources and eventually lose their competitive advantage, hindering the high-quality development of universities.

3.2. Weak faculty development and difficulties in introducing talents

Teachers are key to the quality of teaching and learning, and the quality of teaching affects the overall level of school operation. At present, the problem of teachers is one of the important issues that hinder the high-quality development of private colleges and universities in China. Due to the disadvantages of private colleges and universities, such as weak discipline quality and research platforms, insufficient funding for introducing teachers, they cannot attract high-level talents and the overall backwardness of teacher team construction. Generally, the faculty team of private colleges and universities shows the trend of "two low and one high," that is, low education, low title, and a high proportion of young teachers, which is obviously

different from the faculty team of public colleges and universities.^[2] In addition, private colleges and universities also have the problem of poor stability and high mobility of teachers. According to survey data in Liaoning Province, the loss rate of full-time teachers in private colleges and universities in the province is 50%, and the loss rate is very high. This phenomenon of poor stability of teaching teams, high teacher mobility, and difficulty in introducing teachers has a negative impact on the normal teaching work of private colleges and universities. It also affects the pace of high-quality development of private universities.

3.3. Funding difficulties and high tuition dependency

Most private colleges and universities have narrow financing channels, few available resources, and a heavy debt burden, which makes it difficult for them to meet the huge resources and financial needs required for high-quality development. At the early stage of development, private colleges and universities basically rely on tuition fee income and control costs and expenses to maintain the basic operation of the school, and the source of funding is relatively single. With the expansion of school scale, the renewal of teaching facilities, the upgrading of school level, and the improvement of teaching quality, the capital investment of private colleges and universities is getting bigger and bigger, and it is difficult to rely on tuition fees to maintain the operation. If they want to enter the capital market to attract investment, they will face huge market risk, which also has a negative impact on the development of private colleges and universities.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH-QUALITY PRIVATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

4.1. Fostering specialties

The characteristics of running a university are the root of its development and the lifeline of its survival, and only with these characteristics can there be vitality and development quality.^[3] A university is an organizational institution with disciplines and specialties as its core, and the disciplines and specialties, as the specific bearers of the four functions of talent cultivation, scientific research, social service, cultural inheritance, and innovation, have a supporting and leading role in the development of the university. The characteristics of higher education are mainly formed in the discipline specialties and, through the characteristics of professional disciplines, lead the university to form characteristics in talent training, teaching, and research.

Professions and disciplines, while interrelated, are also distinct. Disciplines are classifications of scientific bodies of knowledge, and different disciplines are

different bodies of knowledge. A profession, on the other hand, corresponds to an occupation, i.e., some specific labour and characteristics that distinguish one occupation from others. A profession may necessitate the accumulation of knowledge from various disciplines, and a discipline may necessitate its application in various professions; a discipline is founded on a profession, and a profession is founded on a discipline. In terms of disciplines and specialties, the focus of private colleges and universities should be different from that of public colleges and universities. Public colleges and universities usually take discipline construction as their leader, while private colleges and universities are short of experience and funding. Therefore, a market-oriented professional setting is an effective way for the high-quality development of private colleges and universities, and professional characteristics are the key to the high-quality development of private colleges and universities.

4.2. Strengthening the teaching force

Teachers are fundamental to running a school, and they are also the main body of education, scientific research, and service to society in universities. The biggest capital of universities is teachers, and the reason why famous schools have appeal is that there are famous teachers and masters. The quality of students depends on teachers, and teachers determine the quality of education, teaching, and talent training of the university. There are the following paths to strengthen the teaching force:

First of all, the construction of the faculty should be strengthened through the introduction of talents. Private colleges and universities should fully utilize the benefits of flexible institutional mechanisms, open broad recruitment channels for the introduction of talents, strengthen contact with domestic and foreign universities, headhunting agents, enterprises, and government; publicize the benefits of professional characteristics, institutional mechanisms, and talent cultivation of private colleges and universities; and formulate special policies for the introduction of talents to provide policy incentives for outstanding doctors to join. At the same time, flexible introduction methods such as guest professors can also be adopted to actively promote the sharing of teacher resources with public universities and encourage them to participate in the discipline and professional construction and team building of private universities.

Second, the faculty should be strengthened through training. It is especially important to strengthen teachers' in-service training because most teachers in private colleges and universities graduated from traditional colleges and universities, but in private colleges and universities, they are faced with non-traditional students and non-traditional training goals and teaching content. Therefore, private colleges and universities should formulate targeted teacher training plans based on professional development needs combined with teachers'

personal growth goals and their own abilities, and provide teachers with diversified development measures, including induction education, teacher ethics education, classroom learning, in-service degree study, further study abroad, and other forms of learning.

Finally, it is necessary to strengthen the faculty construction of private universities through incentive mechanisms. First, private colleges and universities can implement equity incentives on the basis of improving teachers' basic salaries and welfare benefits. Schools can convert teachers' personal performance into investment stocks as rewards, or convert teachers' years of service into investment stocks, so that teachers can share the long-term benefits of colleges and universities and reduce staff turnover. Second, private colleges and universities can change the status quo of teachers' evaluation of professional titles only by regarding the teaching results of full-time teachers as the basic requirements for the evaluation of professional titles at private colleges, which can improve the teaching level and quality of the school. Thirdly, Teachers should be able to gain a certain degree of autonomy, and leaders of private colleges and universities should dare to authorize and delegate power so that teachers can take different forms to participate in school teaching, research, and management as masters. At the same time, teachers' opinions must be fully respected, and reasonable opinions of teachers must be actively adopted to enhance teachers' sense of responsibility and mission.

4.3. Strengthen social cooperation

The characteristics of a university are formed by its interaction with society. The value of the characteristics of a university depends on its contribution to social development, which is widely recognized by society. The development of scientific research that serves society, the transformation of results, and the development of technology are important features of the scientific research of private colleges and universities, and it is also a realistic way to develop scientific research in private colleges and universities. Private colleges and universities should take advantage of the school's applied disciplines, organically integrate with the social and economic development of the region, face the needs of local social and economic development, strengthen applied scientific research, and give full play to the role of private colleges in serving the locality. Only by working hard to transform research results into actual productive forces can we better serve society and industry so as to strongly support and promote local social and economic development. At the same time, the successful transformation of scientific research results can relieve the financial pressure of colleges and universities to a certain extent, and can also enhance the school's self-development ability, provide

space for the school's own survival and development, and promote the high-quality development of private colleges and universities.

4.4. Upholding the spiritual values of the university

A community of knowledge, a community of academics, a community of ideas, a community of culture, a community of morality, a beacon of society, a moral highland, a provider of ideas, and a guide of civilization in today's society, which determines that universities should stay away from secularization, utilitarianization, and instrumentalization. ^[4]However, the path of survival and development of private universities has caused them to carry utilitarian, secular, and instrumental purposes since their birth, and in order to survive and develop, they have to meet the targets of the government, the demands of the market, the taste of students, and the level of teachers, which makes their transcendental goals insufficient and affect the ultimate goal and noble vision of talent training. Therefore, in order to make a qualitative leap and enhance their connotation, private universities must return to the spiritual value of universities, requiring human nobility, national responsibility, and future mission. They can be pragmatic and rational in operation and fund-raising and financial management, but they must de-secularize, utilitarianize, instrumentalize, and administrativeize in teaching and educating people, build a firewall between society and campus, nobility and vulgarity, and let ideology, culture, academic, morality, and religion We should not only be responsible for students' graduation and employment, but also for their social growth. This is important not only for the reality of the country and the nation, but also for the future of the country and the nation. It can be said that the new dynamic energy of high-quality development of private colleges and universities is the development of an invisible and unquantifiable spiritual connotation, and reform is the most powerful means for the high-quality development of private colleges and universities.

For a period of time in the future, the high-quality development of private colleges and universities will be dependent on using the means of reform to approach the lofty spiritual value infinitely, find the spiritual value of the university and hold it, so that it can be deeply rooted in the land of China. The fastest-growing and best private universities in the future are bound to be those that have implemented the best and most thorough reforms and can best protect the spirit of the university.

5.CONCLUSION

After the socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, private higher education is gradually moving towards standardization, rule of law and specialization. At present, realizing the modernization of

higher education and building a strong country in higher education requires private colleges and universities to regard high-quality development as their main task and inherent requirement for running schools. Therefore, private colleges and universities must focus on the fundamental question of who to train, how to train them, and for whom, with their own high-quality development, adapt to the overall situation of high-quality development of my country's higher education, and further supplement and enrich higher education resources. Meet the people's expectations for diversified and high-level higher education, serve the high-quality development of the economy and society, and shoulder the due responsibilities of private universities.

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