

# Research on Higher Education Governance in China and the West

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## ABSTRACT

Globalization has brought the world closer together and many countries have been involved in educational governance. Scholars have studied the governance of higher education from multiple perspectives, such as organizational management, ecological environment, and reform process. Based on the background of Chinese and Western higher education, this paper analyzes the development history, features and current situation of Chinese and Western higher education governance by reading a large amount of literature, and recognizes the existing problems and deficiencies of Chinese higher education governance, such as the lack of independence of universities, the low degree of academic freedom, and the imperfect democratic participation mechanism. Through comparative analysis, the advantages of the west in higher education governance are explored, transplanted and localized so that the modernization process of China's higher education governance is constantly accelerated, such as accelerating the pace of legalization of education governance, appropriate decentralization of government power, and improving democratic participation mechanism.

**Keywords:** *Chinese and Western, Higher educational governance, Differences, Modernization.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the improvement of social development and economic capacity, many countries around the world attach great importance to education governance. After all, education is a very powerful social force and it is fundamental to a country. Regarding the governance of higher education in China and the West, some scholars have studied the reform process, ecological dilemma and the change of government role. Also, the modernization of higher education governance capacity is still being explored. Based on the background of Chinese and Western higher education, this paper reads a large amount of literature to analyze the development history, characteristics, and current situation of Chinese and Western higher education governance, identifies the advantages and reference significance of western higher education, and makes constructive suggestions on the localization of the Chinese education supervision system and governance theory. Due to China's historical tradition and political system, China's higher education governance tends to be administrated and bureaucratized and the academic environment lacks vigor and vitality. How to localize western education governance theories and improve the governance environment of colleges and universities constantly is the opportunity and challenge

presented by the new era. The following part describes the situation of higher education in China at first, then describes the situation of higher education in the West. Afterwards, it explores the differences between the two sides. Finally, the author puts forward constructive suggestions for improving the current situation of higher education in China.

## 2. CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE

### *2.1 The history of the development of Chinese higher educational governance*

The Sino-Western School was set up in Tianjin in 1895 and it was the earliest prototype of a modern Chinese university. Founded in 1898, Peking University is the earliest government-run university in China. The management of universities in early China had a strong feudal color and followed the dual mode of the Sui Dynasty which was the highest institution in the central government and the educational administrative organization. The rulers had the highest power and allocated resources to govern universities. During the period of the Republic of China, impacted by the independence of new ideological education, China

studied the French management mode, implemented the university district system and graduate school system and pursued the independence of academic and bureaucratic politics. However, it failed.

At the beginning of the founding of New China, the government dominated the governance of institutions of higher learning and highly centralized power. In order to cultivate talents needed for socialist construction and national defense construction and stabilize the current situation, national political power dominated the governance of colleges and universities. Due to the special political environment, colleges and universities throughout the country followed the Soviet model and carried out a planned and step-by-step adjustment of departments. After 1957, Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated and the development of higher education began to abandon foreign models and return to tradition. During the Cultural Revolution, class struggle was advocated and the higher education administration experienced disorder and chaos. After the reform and opening up, China began to learn from the governance concepts of European and American colleges and universities, study and transplant them diligently, expand the enrollment scale, reform the curriculum system and teaching content and establish an educational governance system of colleges and universities with Chinese characteristics gradually. With the development of the market economy, the economy and society have separated from the government gradually and become important subjects of social governance, Chinese higher educational governance realized the structural transformation from a single subject of governance to multiple subjects of governance[1].

## **2.2 Current situation**

On one hand, China has made some achievements. The government begins to change its role and delegate its power increasingly from an administrator to a coordinator. In addition, more interest groups participate in the governance of universities gradually, such as society, students and parents. The emergence of multi-subject governance has brought about fundamental changes in governance relations and multi-subject governance has become a new form of governance[2].

Chinese higher education is advancing the rule of law constantly. In the new era, the main contradiction of higher education tends to be complicated and diversified. The university should be run according to law and strive to create a fair and equal governance environment to protect the interests of diverse groups and promote the steady development of the university.

On the other hand, there are some problems, like lack of independence, unclear responsibilities of the party committee and the president, difficulty to implement

professors, and stakeholders' participation mechanism is not sound.

Chinese universities lack autonomy, they do not become legal persons in the true sense and do not have equal negotiating positions with the government, enterprises and other institutions. Chinese universities are mainly funded by the government. The president is appointed by the government directly and the internal management of the university follows various decrees issued by the education department. Due to the single source of funds, the university is not connected with the society closely, which makes it difficult to mobilize multilateral stakeholders to participate in university governance and lacks democratic supervision and accountability mechanism.

Article 39 of the Higher Education Law clearly stipulates that "state-run institutions of higher learning shall carry out the president responsibility system under the leadership of the grassroots committee of higher learning of the Communist Party of China", which means that the president responsibility system under the leadership of the party committee. Under the system, the party secretary and the president of a university have absolute authority but their responsibilities are not defined clearly, resulting in power consumption and low decision-making and execution efficiency.

In China, university administrative rights are greater than academic rights, and teachers represented by professors have fewer opportunities to participate in university decision-making and have a weak right to discourse.

In recent years, some universities have set up boards of directors or development committees but only to raise funds for the university. Their functions have been marginalized and they have no opportunity to participate in university governance. Boards and development committees are mostly from within the school and do not include multilateral stakeholders, such as students and parents, resulting in imperfect oversight mechanisms and generalization of administrative power.

## **2.3 Features**

College governance mode with Chinese characteristics and adapted to China's national conditions and political systems. In the President's responsibility system under the leadership of party committees, the vertical management mode is beneficial to the transmission of information and improves administrative efficiency. For example, campus paroxysmal epidemic situation, it can respond quickly, and formulate corresponding measures, the first time to block the spread of the epidemic. However, from the long-term operation effect, it is too administrative, bureaucratic, and lacks democratic supervision and accountability mechanism.

### **3. WESTERN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE**

#### ***3.1 The history of the development of higher educational governance***

Western universities were founded in the 12th century in the form of early guilds. The original universities, organized by teachers or students for the common good, practiced scholar autonomy. Universities can control their funds, manage their teaching and administrative affairs, and have the freedom of academic research. With the development of capitalism, interest subjects are diversified and the connection between universities and society is increasingly deepened. People from society, such as local educators, donors and entrepreneurs, begin to participate in university governance. After the Industrial Revolution, the economic marketization degree of western countries improved and the government was completely separated from the university. The university gradually became an independent legal entity, running schools independently and having the right to choose various educational policies. The government only guides and supervises colleges and universities. Most colleges and universities adopt the president responsibility system under the leadership of the board of directors, which has the highest decision-making power and makes various policies of the school. The president is appointed by the board of directors to exercise his powers and powers within a certain range and to run the university. As for the internal governance of the university, the president should report to the board of Directors and the leading group dominated by the president will be responsible for implementation after the council members discuss and make decisions. Western higher education governance participation groups from single to diversified, from concerned about internal governance to concerned about the impact of the external environment, still maintains independence.

#### ***3.2 Current situation***

Western universities represented by Britain and America have formed a situation of university autonomy, academic freedom and the combination of teaching and research.

The university is independent of religion, government, social enterprises, public institutions, and individuals, and it has the right to manage itself and make decisions about its internal affairs.

Attaching importance to the role of academic rights in university development. Western universities generally have faculty councils, they are made up of qualified professors from various faculties, divisions, departments, lectures and other organizations. Professors have important say and decision-making power in academic affairs, such as discipline construction, specialty sets,

scientific research, etc. At the same time, the faculty association plays an important advisory and reference role in the development of the university, which guarantees academic freedom and faculty governance.

#### ***3.3 Features***

First, school-based. In the relationship between the government and the school, the government plays a supervisory and advisory role and the school has the right to independence and autonomy.

Second, academic standards. In the relationship between schools and professors, administrative rights are weakened, academic rights are strengthened and academic freedom is high.

### **4. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND FOREIGN HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE**

#### ***4.1 Differences in national systems, economic conditions and cultural dimensions***

The essence of governance is the constant change and perfection of system and structure. Xianjun Liu holds the idea that university governance refers to the structure and process in which stakeholders inside and outside of the university participate in the decision-making of major university affairs[3]. Influenced by the national system, economic situation, and cultural dimension, there are obvious differences in higher education governance between China and foreign countries.

China has gone through feudalism, the Republic of China, and now the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. Influenced by history and tradition, China's university management is basically a centralized state.

Since the founding of new China, with the acceleration of reform and opening up and the continuous improvement of the economic level, the management of colleges and universities has experienced the centralized the change of the President's responsibility system under the leadership of party committees. It has obtained certain achievements, but the school administration is still above the academic rights, lacks autonomy, the university currently has not formed an academic atmosphere of freedom and social contact is not close enough, participation in the multilateral interest groups is not high. It is difficult to achieve co-governance. In addition, Influenced by Confucian culture, China is relatively conservative in reform and change, and the degree of openness and tolerance of universities needs to be improved. From the perspective of development, the governance process of higher education in China develops slowly. On the contrary, the west has a system of separation of powers. Democracy and freedom become

a mainstream ideas after the bourgeois revolution. Later, the industrial revolution was completed earlier and the economy had a qualitative leap. It provided a solid and abundant economic foundation for higher education administration. In addition, the open and inclusive cultural atmosphere in the west is fully reflected in the academic freedom of universities and colleges. The relaxed atmosphere enables more western scholars to make achievements in their own fields. Afterwards, with the continuous development of the market mechanism, represented by British and American western university has a high degree of autonomy. The government is only a supplementary role, advocating academic freedom and social contact closely, basically achieving the multilateral governance of stakeholders. For example, the governance committee of a western university has absolute authority and has the power to remove the president. The committee members are diverse, including school leaders, teachers and students, as well as community members such as local educators and investors. Therefore, they can take multilateral interests into account when they deal with school problems.

#### ***4.2 Awareness of stakeholder participation in governance***

The different financial sources of Chinese and Western universities directly result in the size of autonomy rights. Correspondingly, it is the level of stakeholders' participation. Chinese public universities receive most of their funding from the central and local governments so they have limited autonomy and are subject to the jurisdiction of the central and local governments. In this case, the enthusiasm of stakeholders to participate in university governance is not too high. For example, many parents have a long-cherished wish is that their children go to college but they don't think deeply - what can I recommend for their child's college? Some school officials believe that students have not yet developed a mature world view and the opinions raised by the student group are more of a formality. The funds for running schools in western universities mainly come from the society so the degree of stakeholders participating in governance is relatively high. From the composition of the governance committee mentioned above, it can be seen that every stakeholder has the right and opportunity to speak out. The participation of multilateral stakeholders makes the governance environment of colleges and universities more diversified and ecological.

Being able to govern means performing collectively blinding decisions effectively designed and implemented through the ongoing production of policies, societal conditions, and processes[4]. Based on the above discussion, the following constructive suggestions are put forward on how to realize the modernization of higher education governance in China.

First, run schools under the law. The legal system is the support and support of educational governance. Laws and regulations in the field of education should be improved and relevant government departments should supervise the implementation of laws in colleges and universities to ensure that there are laws to abide by in the operation process of colleges and universities and gradually realize the legalization of higher education governance.

Second, strengthen the government to delegate power, and define the responsibilities of party committees and presidents. The government should transition to the role of "meta-governance" in higher education governance. While controlling the general direction of higher education development, the government should appropriately delegate its power so that colleges and universities can have a certain autonomy. Currently, the principal is responsible for the system under the leadership of the communist party, not completely define the party committee and the principal responsibility, both duties overlap, easy to cause repeated deliberation so we should define the responsibilities and try to communist party leadership and the principal autonomous governance structure, the general policy of the party committee in charge of audit in colleges and universities development and strategy, performed by the principal and he is responsible for the feedback. The principal has independent decision-making power for the specific affairs of the school.

Third, professors should follow the principle of academic orientation. In the development process of western universities, no matter how the external environment changes, they always stick to academic logic. Baocun Liu explained the idea of running a university is "a place to explore universal knowledge and impart universal knowledge"[5], so the university should follow the academic standard, advocate professors to do research and create a good atmosphere of academic autonomy. Academic ability and scientific research strength are the ultimate standards to measure the quality of a university.

Fourth, improve democratic participation and accountability mechanisms. In 2021, the gross enrollment rate of higher education in China has reached 57.8% and it has entered the stage of popularization. The benefit group of education is the general public so social groups should really participate in the governance of colleges and universities and their needs will provide valuable suggestions for the development of colleges and universities. Students should be given the right and opportunity to participate in school governance and build a hardware, social and cognitive environment[6]. Besides, Stewart Ranson offers a persuasive argument that links the idea of the school as a democratic community, the confidence that young people can develop in such a setting and their agency in helping improve the

conditions of learning[7]. We should gradually transition from single governance to diversified governance and form a situation in which society, students, parents and other multilateral interest groups jointly govern. In addition, the accountability mechanism should be improved. At present, the accountability of Chinese institutions of higher learning is top-down. Corresponding rules and regulations should be issued to ensure two-way accountability, interest groups also have the right to hold party committees and presidents accountable so as to realize the transparency and democratic supervision of rights.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Educational governance is a dynamic process, both Chinese and Western higher education governance adapts to social background and basic national conditions and improved with the development of the market economy. This paper only compares the differences between Chinese and Western higher education governance from the aspects of economy, culture and system. In the future, comparative analysis can be carried out from more aspects, such as the governance strategies of Chinese and Western higher education in the post-epidemic era. New discoveries will be made with each exploration.

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