

The Influence of University Culture on the First-Class Universities and First-Rate Disciplines Construction

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Abstract

As a kind of soft power, university culture plays the leading and supporting role in the reforms and development of universities. In the process of the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction, culture is the critical element for the development of universities. Culture, the soft power, has become the core competence of universities. It has a strong power of cohesion and inspiration. In the new historical period, it is essential to strengthen the university culture to enhance the quality and efficiency of the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction. On the one hand, the university's cultural construction should emphasize its characteristics and avoid the single form. On the other hand, the construction shall hold the principle of refraining from doing some things in order to accomplish other things, assessing the situation and making reasonable choices.

Key words: University culture; The first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction; Leading and supporting role

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University culture refers to the summary of material culture, spiritual culture, institutional culture and

behavioral culture, accumulated and formed on the basis of long-term school-running practices of universities, and they complement each other and are dialectically unified as an organic whole (Wang, 2005). The university culture is internalized in the university's school-running ideology, value pursuits, and academic culture, and it is explicit in the university's rules and regulations, school-running practices, infrastructures and other aspects. In a subtle manner, it affects the ways of thinking and behaviors of teachers and students. It breeds the reform and development of the university like a spring rain. Moreover, it is the intrinsic support for universities to improve the school-running level and achieve leapfrog development. (Zhong & Zhao, 2010) Meanwhile, the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction also needs to absorb nutrients from university culture and thrive.

1. PLANS OF BUILDING WORLD-CLASS UNIVERSITIES IN GERMANY, JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA AND SINGAPORE

In the time of globalization, universities have become major institutions for knowledge exchange and collision, attracting and gathering talents. Globalization provides new opportunities for the rapid development of higher educations. Several countries and regions in the world have made similar plans for building world-class universities.

In 2005, the German government launched the *Excellence Initiative Program*, which aims to promote universities to carry out top scientific researches and academic innovations, and enhance the university's international competitiveness. The plan has set a 5-year construction cycle and the rolling selection system, that is, 2006 to 2011 as the first cycle, and 2012 to 2017 as the second cycle. The program is jointly funded by the federal government and the state governments, accounting

for 75% and 25% respectively. So far, the implementation of the program has broken the development pattern of inherent balance in universities to a certain extent. To encourage fair competitions, it adopts the methods of performance evaluations and dynamic allocations, contributing to consolidating the international status of Germany as a scientific and humanist country (Li, 2016).

After entering the 21st century, Japan has been committed to promoting the reform and development of higher education in domestic. In June 2001, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan issued *The University Structure Reform Guidelines*, which instructs a series of measures, like merger and restructuring for public universities, incorporation, the evaluation from the professional institutions of the third party. In July 2002, Japan began to carry out the 21st Century COE Program, also called *The 21st Century Center of Excellence*, aiming at funding universities in priorities in some superior subject areas according to the professional evaluations from the third party. Thus, Japan can establish education and research bases of high levels, and enable some universities to become high-quality universities of international competitiveness. *The 21st Century COE Program* is divided into two periods. The first period is from 2002 to 2009, with the aim to improve the education and research level of graduate schools in universities. The second period is from 2010 to the present, whose goal is to further strengthen the education and research functions of the graduate schools, and cultivate high-end talents of creativity who can lead the world trend. In addition, the second period also intent to establish international excellence research bases to promote the university's international competitiveness. The project depends on the professional evaluation from the third party, and for the excellence research bases that have passed the evaluations will be granted annual funding supports, ranging from 10 million yen to 500 million yen (Fang, 2009).

In 1999, South Korea proposed *The Brain Korea 21 Project* (hereinafter referred to as *The BK21 project*). It is a significant reform plan for higher educations, which is targeted at the growth of world-class research universities and fostering talents of creativity and high quality. Apart from the boom of universities and the instruction of talents, it also favors the local universities and promote their connections with industries. *The BK21 Project* attaches importance to the input and output benefits of research funding allocation, rather than the equal opportunities for each university. The first construction phase of the project is from 1999 to 2005, which has obtained better results. From 2006 to 2012, the government began to carry out *The Post-BK21 Project*. In the first construction cycle, the South Korean government has invested a total of \$ 1.1 billion to develop a world-class graduate school, of which \$ 38 million is taken each year to promote the growth of local universities.

In the second construction cycle, the South Korean government has invested 2.03 trillion won, in favor of the further development of high-level universities and the establishment of the world top-level research institutions. *The BK21 Project* has made a great difference in building world-class graduate schools of universities in Korea and backing up the development of local universities. In turn, those measures have significantly improved the scientific research capabilities and international competitiveness of its universities (Lian, 2011).

Since the 1990s, Singapore has put forward the plan to found the world's top universities, and regarded the four public universities, including the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Singapore's Nanyang Technological University (NTU) as major support targets. The Singaporean government attaches great importance to the internationalization of universities. It tends to cultivate students' awareness of globalization, create the university culture of pursuit for excellence, and encourages competitive financial supports. For instance, Singapore has spared no effort in enhancing the international level of its universities. According to statistics, half of the faculty, 25% of undergraduates and 70% of graduate students of the National University of Singapore, come from more than 100 countries and regions around the world, which is also a crucial symbol of its internationalization. The Singaporean government empowers public universities greater autonomy in school running. These universities keep up with international standards, reinforce the consciousness of pursuing excellence. Furthermore, the public universities conduct peer reviews on infrastructures, academic researches, income levels and other aspects, involving schools, departments, teachers, and individuals of different levels. They introduce talents in a world-wide range and output educations, research and innovation results of quality to the society. The Singapore government has dug deep into its pockets in the construction of the world's top universities. From 2011 to 2015, the government's investment in university researches and development was up to \$ 16 billion. The huge financial support from the government has accelerated its construction of world-class universities and guaranteed strong material supports (Ramakrishnan, 2013).

2. FROM THE INITIAL STAGE TO THE CONSTRUCTION STAGE OVER THE FIRST-CLASS UNIVERSITIES AND FIRST-RATE DISCIPLINES CONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

Since the 1990s, China has successively arranged and implemented two construction projects, the *211 Project* and *985 Project*, which have boosted the comprehensive

strength in school running and international influence of a number of key construction universities. The projects have also driven the overall level of higher education in China and made contributions to economic and social development. On May 4, 2014, at teacher-student forum of the Peking University, General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed in his speech, “we must unswervingly construct a world-class university”. He reiterated China’s strategic decision to build a world-class university, and highlighted to make China’s top universities a success. Premier Li Keqiang has also repeatedly requested that reforms should be carried out to optimize the allocation of educational resources, stimulate the vitality of school running, and make greater contributions to sustainable development, ensuring and improving people’s livelihood.

In October 2015, the State Council issued *The General Planning for First-class Universities and First-rate Disciplines Construction*. It said, for the magnificent target, achieve the historic leapfrog development from a big country of higher education to a stronger country of higher education, the basic principles are “adhere to the goal of first-class, adhere to the basic principles of discipline, adhere to the performance as the lever, and adhere to the reform as the driving force”. In addition, the scheme also illustrates the construction tasks, reform directions and safeguard measures. The decision of the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction is a long-term strategy implemented by the government, with the purpose of realizing the national goal of “striving from a bigger education country to a stronger education country”. Moreover, it also explains and practices the meaning in the modernization of China’s higher education. In January 2017, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, and the National Development and Reform Commission jointly issued the *Implementation Measures for the Overall Promotion of the First-class Universities and First-rate Disciplines Construction (Provisional)*. As for the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction, it expounds the selection conditions and procedures, supporting ways, dynamic management methods and how to organize the executing process, which symbolizes the official implementation of the construction strategy. The construction scheme takes every 5 years a construction cycle. It adopts the strategy of total control, open competition, and dynamic adjustment. Up to now, it is available for the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction of the top-level design, management system, development scheme, selection standard and procedures. *The Implementation Measures for the Overall Promotion of the First-class Universities and First-rate Disciplines Construction (Provisional)* underlines the needs to mobilize the enthusiasm of local governments to support the development of universities. Besides, the proposal also encourages the local government to intensify policy, resources, and financial

supports through various channels.

In September 2017, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, and the National Development and Reform Commission jointly issued the *Announcement on Publication of List of World-Class Universities and Construction Disciplines of First-class Universities and First-rate Disciplines Construction*, which officially announced to the public the list of the university and disciplines under the strategy of the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction. At the national level, the construction strategy has profoundly affected the ideology and practice of local governments to support university development. At present, a number of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have formulated plans for actions to favor the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction. The policy supports have been assured and the corresponding financial supporting plans have been followed.

As a part of social organization, universities are not only tools for economic reproduction, but also a means for cultural reproduction (Barnett, 2016). The world-class universities maintain abundant cultural resources. Moreover, they are also treasure troves for coexistence of multiple culture. The universities make it possible for the deeply mutual understanding and integration of multiple culture through inheritance and innovation.

3. UNIVERSITY CULTURE, THE STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE FIRST-CLASS UNIVERSITIES AND FIRST-RATE DISCIPLINES CONSTRUCTION

3.1 The Long History of Research Universities, the Fertile Field to Cultivate Cultural Heritage

Culture is the spiritual product derived from human activities of transforming nature. After the transformation by human beings, the aesthetic experience and the sublimation of its concepts, natural substances will be transformed into sentimental objects in abstract, which have been endowed with new connotations by human beings. At the same time, in turn, culture, the product of development of human society, can shape people and provide guidelines for society. Because culture bears the function of conveying human civilization, affecting human behavior, and strengthening social cohesion (Yang, 2015). The long history of running a research university is fertile field for cultural growth and breeds a profound cultural heritage, which is specifically embodied through the university’s school songs, school mottos, school spirit, school outlook, academic traditions, and school running characteristics. As a tool of the nation, university undertakes the crucial mission of cultivating talents. It is also the center of cultural inheritance and innovation, and it is the place for instruction and enlightening the concept

of commending moral, closing to the people, and striving for perfection. In the process of the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction, university plays the foundation role, whose functions shall not be underestimated in building up world-class universities and first-class disciplines. Culture construction shall be taken as a fundamental and overall requirement for universities, and the construction shall be established in the characteristics of China, focus on the current situations of the university, and upgrade the level and taste of cultural heritage, enhance the core competitiveness of soft power of culture, so as to boost the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction (Wang, 2005).

3.2 The Guidance and Support of University Culture in the First-Class Universities and First-Rate Disciplines Construction

Culture is the important starting point to support the development of universities. General Secretary Xi Jinping points out that without spiritual strength, it is difficult for a nation to be self-confidence and self-reliance, and no cause could last for a long time without the support of culture. The prosperity of culture is the premise of the development and prosperity the state and nation. Similarly, the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction and the leapfrog development of universities is inseparable from the cultural heritage. As an important symbol of the university's comprehensive strength, culture has increasingly become the center elements of university decision-makings. Culture construction has been listed a considerable part of university development strategy. Because university culture is reflected in the school running practices, rules and regulations, ways of thinking and behaviors of teacher and students. As a result, the penetration and integration of culture in the development of the university is related to the foundation of its survival. Besides, university development demands not only the great financial favor at the material level, but also the support and guidance of culture at the spiritual and conceptual level. The development of the university carries the moral characters of culture that conduce to a higher stage of its development.

Culture has a strong power of cohesion and inspiration. Whether the function of the university culture can be exerted and to what extent depends on two aspects. One is whether it can unit and inspire people. The other is whether it can be accepted and converted into spiritual drive by teachers and students. The cohesion of culture is established in the culture recognition, its attraction and cohesion for teachers and students that enable them to consciously unite and collaborate for the interests of the university's cultural community and promote its further development. For one aspect, university culture expresses the domination, guidance and care for teachers and students. For another is the dependence and observance of teachers and students on university culture. Culture

cohesion facilitates the formation of the centripetal force of the university's cultural community, and it improves the coordination and integration between teachers and students, which ensures the stability and development of the university (Sun & Ma, 2004). The inspiration of university culture derives from the awareness of the reality reflections, which can encourage, inspire, urge and unite people. For some extent, the inspiration also conveys the sense of recognition and belonging of the value of university culture of teachers and students. In general, the cohesion and inspiration win extensive mass foundation and fresh vitality for university culture. Therefore, the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction calls for its exercise of cohesiveness and inspiration. Only by this way, can the unique culture moral character be developed and the culture value of high recognition be formed, demonstrating the power of the university's ideology and spirit. The first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction shall be centered by inheriting and promoting its spiritual connotation of university culture. Thus, teachers and students can learn the humanistic spiritual strength from the school running and transform the university's long-standing culture tradition into deepening comprehensive reforms. As a consequence, the modern university system would be perfected, creating valuable spirit wealth for the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction. It is necessary to make the cohesion and inspiration of university a full play for reinforcing comprehensive strength of universities and promoting the constructions, end up in ranking among the world's high-level universities.

As soft power, culture is the core competitiveness of the university. The idea of soft power was firstly proposed by Harvard Professor Joseph S. Nye in the 1990s. It has been spread to China for nearly 30 years. Soft power refers to the international influence and inspiration of a nation's cultural traditions, social systems, development models and other aspects. Universities, as the base for nurturing new knowledge, new ideas, new methods, new organizational forms and institutional structures, are the birthplace of national soft power (Ding, 2004). Culture soft power of universities refers to the influence, cohesion and inspiration of spiritual achievements that are beyond the physical existence and are created and formulated by teachers and students over their practices (An, 2009). It contains material culture, spiritual culture, institutional culture and behavioral culture. As an important part of soft power, university culture is the spiritual drive and the intellectual support for the university. To a certain extent, it is linked with the core competitiveness of the university and reflects the development potential of the university. Over the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction, the soft power of university culture is an existing spiritual force. It conveys the ideas and ideals pursuit of a university, and it is the indispensable spiritual

pillar for the university to realize further development. In addition, it is also a feasible way to enhance the core competitiveness by the soft power of university culture construction. Building a world-class university requires not only the hard power, like the first-class infrastructure, but also the outstanding soft power of university culture. Attentions shall be paid to the culture cultivation of high quality and high level so that university culture construction can provide guidance and support for the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction.

4. STRENGTHENING THE UNIVERSITY CULTURE CONSTRUCTION FOR THE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF THE FIRST-CLASS UNIVERSITIES AND FIRST-RATE DISCIPLINES CONSTRUCTION

Looking back to the 985 project and 211 project, the main construction tasks of the former are divided into several aspects: mechanism innovations, team buildings, platform establishment, condition favors, and international exchanges and cooperation. The tasks for the latter place emphasis on three major parts, the whole situation of the university, key disciplines and the construction of higher education public service system. Both of the projects pay more attention to the hardware construction of the universities, such as scientific research platforms, infrastructure, teaching and office buildings, sports venues and network equipment constructions, which has laid a solid foundation for enhance the level of higher education of China and accumulated experience for future improvement. In the new period, the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction highlights the university culture inheritance and innovation, exerts the educational role of excellent culture, and boosts the construction of advanced socialist culture.

In *The General Planning for First-class Universities and First-rate Disciplines Construction* (2015, No.64), issued by the State Council in October 2015, indicated that it is essential to strengthen university culture construction, enhance cultural awareness and confidence in systems over the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction, forming the top-ranking university spirit and university culture that promotes social progress, leads the civilization process, and bears its own characteristics. In January 2017, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, and the National Development and Reform Commission jointly issued the *Implementation Measures for the Overall Promotion of the First-class Universities and First-rate Disciplines Construction (Provisional)* (2017, No.2). It declares the needs to build university spirit and university culture that leads social progress and bears distinctive characteristics. University culture has been strategically included in the first-class universities

and first-rate disciplines construction by the state.

The extensive learning in universities is the booster for the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction. According to the researches of Zhong Binglin and Zhao Yingsheng, at present, most of the universities in China emphasize the extension while overlook the intension over the university culture construction, and culture fails to fully play the education role. In addition, there is a lack of distinct personalities of university culture. It is manifested in the homogeneity of talent training and target positioning in various universities, which restricts the display of culture uniqueness and impairs the development of university characteristics. (Zhong & Zhao, 2010)

In the new era, university cultural construction should be intensified to ensure the quality and efficiency of the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction. On the one hand, the unique university culture is essential manifestation of soft power core competitiveness of the university, and the key point of the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction. The university culture construction should emphasize its characteristics and avoid the single form, and promote the university characteristics development with culture construction. Universities shall pursue the uniqueness in school ideology, development targets and models. On the contrary, the uniform is not advocated. On the other hand, it shall be acknowledged that there are dos and don'ts, enterprising but also learning to lose¹. In the process of the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction, it shall hold the principle of refraining from doing some things in order to accomplish other things, assessing the situation and making reasonable choices. However, over the process, there are some universities completely depend on the principles and experience from abroad and it is not such an easy task to mechanically transplant them to Chinese universities. Oranges are produced in Huainan as oranges, but in Huaibei as citrus aurantium. Their leaves are similar, but in fact they have different tastes. So why is it different? It lies in the water and soil.² First of all, it is not wise to merely concentrate on the correspondence between various university rankings, ESI disciplines rankings and other evaluation indicators, or simply copy the development model of world-class universities from abroad. Instead, the construction shall take root in China and run the school based on its own background. Secondly, there are hundreds of years before the world class universities rank the tops, like Cambridge University, Harvard University, and Yale University. From this point of view, it takes time rather than in an action for universities in China for the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction. Thirdly, talent training shall be considered

¹ Fan, Y. *History of the Later Han Dynasty (Vol. 81)*.

² *Yanzi Chunqiu • Volume 10 of Miscellaneous*.

as the core mission for domestic universities. Efforts shall be put into conceiving unique university culture and push the university develop with profound cultural heritage. The mutual promotion is also the purpose of the first-class universities and first-rate disciplines construction.

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