



## External Environment Development of Teaching Staff Construction in Chinese Independent Colleges: Take Chongqing as an Example

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### Abstract

Independent colleges have made major contributions to China higher education development. However, with the rapid expansion of Chinese independent colleges, teaching staff construction issues have become more and more obvious, for example, lack of teaching staff construction, structural imbalance, unsteady teaching teams, and low personal quality. This paper takes 7 independent colleges in Chongqing as examples to analyze external environment influencing the construction of independent colleges' teaching staff construction. At the end of the paper, the authors have given several suggestions for resolving problems occurred during teaching staff construction in independent colleges such as eliminate social prejudice, strengthen personnel laws and regulations construction, increase government support, build colleges and universitie assistance mechanism, establish scientific teaching resource configuration mechanism, and so on.

**Key words:** Independent colleges; Teaching staff construction; External environment development

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### INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth national congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that education should be the primary task of the Party even before improving people's livelihood and strengthening social construction. The conference also strengthened that "the Party will try its best to provide satisfactory education to the people" and "encourage and lead social powers to establish schools" which shows that the Party attaches importance to education and also encourages and support non-governmental funded education development (LU, & Xin, 2012). No doubt, the information given by the conference will provide great opportunities for Chinese non-governmental funded education reform and innovation, healthy and sustainable development, and also enormous encourages for private education workers. Recently, independent colleges have contributed a lot to the rapid development of Chinese higher education. Until May, 2012, there have been 298 independent colleges officially approved by the government which accounts for 26% of China's 1142 universities<sup>1</sup>. By the end of 2010, Chinese independent colleges' internal students reached 2,600,000 and full-time teachers are 126,720<sup>3</sup>. However, with the rapid expansion of Chinese independent colleges, teaching staff construction issues have become more and more obvious, for example, lack of teaching staff construction, structural imbalance, unsteady teaching teams, and low personal quality. The authors of this paper have studied 7 independent colleges in Chongqing, China, investigated independent colleges' teaching staff construction situation and problems, analyzed the influences brought by external environment upon teaching staff construction, and therefore gives related suggestions on the improvement of teaching staff construction<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>The universities here refer to the ones that establish independent colleges, that is to say, independent colleges' parent university.

<sup>2</sup>2012 List of Universities Qualifying for Recruiting Higher Education Degree Students.

<sup>3</sup>National Education Development Statistical Bulletin 2011. Ministry of Education, China.

<sup>4</sup>Related data were provided by personnel departments of the 7 independent colleges until December, 2012.

## **1. CHINESE INDEPENDENT COLLEGES' TEACHING STAFF CONSTRUCTION SITUATION AND PROBLEMS**

### **1.1 Significant Short-sighted Teaching Staff Construction Is Obvious and Lacks of Scientific Planning and Systematic Institutional Improvement**

At present, although independent colleges have realized the importance of teaching staff construction, they cannot correctly understand the concept of constructing teaching staff team, for example, low teaching staff construction goals, give priority to short-term construction planning, random and uncertain progresses, personnel system construction seriously lags, and so on. In detail, problems are: a) Lack of systematic supporting mechanism for teachers' training, teaching quality evaluation, teaching behavior norm, and inspiration for teaching and scientific researches; b) Unsound young and middle-aged teachers' professional development, training, and advanced study system; c) No institutional guarantee for high-level personnel such as disciplinary leaders; d) Difficult to set up science positions, lack of detailed policies for position management, and disordered teaching staff formation standard; e) Lack of scientific evaluation system and socialized personnel evaluation mechanism.(CHEN, & ZHANG, 2009)

### **1.2 Although the Total Number of Teachers Can Basically Meet the Needs of The School, the Teaching Resource Structure Is Unreasonable**

#### **1.2.1 High Proportion of External Teachers**

Take Yucai College of Southwest University which has the best comprehensive efficiency of education as example, External teachers take up 46% of the overall teachers (on campus part-time excluded). There are more colleges having higher proportions than Yucai College and some even exceeds 65% such as Yitong College of Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications and Rongzhi College of Chongqing Technology and Business University. The causes of the high proportion of external teachers in independent colleges are: a) From the aspect of saving school running cost, external teachers only require tuition fees but not basic wage, rewards, social insurances, housing fee and other costs which can save a lot human cost. b) It is very difficult to employ certain courses' teachers, for example, art, architecture, gardening, automobile, and so on.

#### **1.2.2 Title Structure Is Basically Reasonable But the Proportion of Senior Titles Is Low and Uneven Distributed**

Teachers' professional title structure has changed from the past "dumbbell-shaped" unreasonable structure into the "senior + middle + primary" (3+4+3) "football type" rational structure. However, the proportion of senior titles

is very low and most teachers owning senior titles are retired teachers, for example, the proportion of senior titles in Yucai College is 33% which is a little bit higher than the rest of researched colleges. The proportion of primary titles is too high and some college even reaches 41%. In addition, the internal distribution of the titles is imbalanced. Traditional majors usually have high proportion of senior title teachers while "hard-to-get" majors always have a low proportion instead, for example, Chinese language and literature major of Yucai College has a high proportion of senior title teachers which is 72% while the proportions in art, architecture, and gardening are less than 20% respectively.

#### **1.2.3 Teachers' Age Structure Is Irrational and the Proportions of the Advanced, the Middle-Aged, and the Young Teachers Are Imbalanced**

The age structure in most independent colleges is not balanced which is not helpful for the communication of teachers and the teaching staff construction. Currently, the advanced and the young groups have taken up a large proportion of the total teaching team. Young teachers, especially graduates who just left universities have become the main stream of the teaching team in nearly every independent college. The proportion of teachers below 35 years old takes up to 51% of all full-time teachers, teachers age 56 and above account for 32%, and middle-aged teachers is in serious shortage.

#### **1.2.4 Degree Structure Is Basically Reasonable But Teachers Having Doctoral Degrees Are Few**

In recent years, the increased enrollment of postgraduates in Chinese universities has provided objective condition for improving teachers' educational backgrounds. With the on job training of full-time teachers, independent colleges' master degree teachers have taken up 48% of the overall teachers. The proportion in some colleges even surpasses 50%, for example, Foreign Trade & Business College of Chongqing Normal University has a percentage of 68% and Yucai College of Southwest University is 57%. However, the fact is that Ph.D. degree teachers are still in great demand for all independent colleges. The proportion of Ph.D. degree teachers in the colleges investigated is less than 3% and all of them are external teachers in independent colleges.

### **1.3 The Source of Teachers Is Complex and the Teaching Team Is Unsteady Which Brings Great Difficulty for Management**

Independent college teachers are mainly made up by four kinds of people: a) retired teachers; b) graduates; c) external teachers from other universities; d) part-time employees from other professional areas. Retired teachers are generally more than 60 years old and their body and energy are limited which makes them rarely participate in activities organized by the teaching department. Due to the part-time labor relation with

independent colleges and their own universities' restrictions, external teachers can only contribute limited energy to the work in independent colleges, that is to say, they basically appear in independent colleges when they have classes there. This phenomenon has made them hard to put all heart and soul into the research work in independent colleges. As the survey showed, Chongqing independent colleges' middle-aged and young teachers usually hold their posts in independent colleges for a short period and their mobility rate is very high. 45% middle-aged and young teachers work less than 3 years for independent colleges, 42% work for 3 to 5 years, and only 13% of them can work more than 5 years in independent colleges.

#### **1.4 Teachers' Professional Ability Does Not Match the School-Running Characteristics and the Overall Education and Teaching Level Cannot Reach A High Standard**

Independent colleges mainly focus on running short-term, hot, and low-cost majors. They propose "staggered development" mode with their parent universities, and locate their talent training target at "moderate profession, solid basic knowledge, strong application ability, and high comprehensive quality" senior application-oriented talents. (DENG SUN, & LI, 2008) Therefore, "Double Qualified Teacher" who both obtains great amount of theoretical knowledge and practical abilities is highly demanded. Although old teachers with senior titles in independent colleges have rich experience, their knowledge is out of date for today's students and they basically lack of ability to update their knowledge which made their lessons short of new contents. In addition, the wide age gap between teachers and students plus great differences appeared in interests and hobbies among old teachers and young fresh college students, the effect of teaching is definitely very poor which can be called the "puffiness of titles". As the main force of teaching staff, most young teachers are just graduated. Although they are young and fresh, they lack of teaching and practical experiences and both their teaching and practical abilities have certain distance from cultivating application-oriented undergraduate talents.

#### **1.5 Teachers' Professional Ethics Require Further Improvement**

Independent college runs under non-governmental mechanism and all staff work under contracts with the college. Although there are some advantages in signing contracts with teachers, teachers' profession identification and sense of belonging to the colleges have been weakened. Teacher usually plays a role as "temporary worker" instead of being a master in independent colleges. Many teachers think teaching is a way of making money and living. They do not have the spirit of educating people and contribute to the society. Besides, independent colleges always focus on teaching but ignore

the university culture construction which has made many teachers lack of responsibility and their diligent spirit at work. Some scholar said "when a teacher uses teaching as a method for living, he or she is not a teacher at all." (LIN, 2007) The low level of teachers' professional ethics has influenced the teaching staff construction in certain degree.

## **2. ANALYSIS ON THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT INFLUENCING CHINESE INDEPENDENT COLLEGES' TEACHING STAFF CONSTRUCTION**

### **2.1 There Are Always Prejudices Upon the Existence of Independent Colleges and Teachers Working for Such Colleges Do Not High Social Identity**

Start at the end of last century, independent colleges are new creation generated by utilizing new mechanisms and social educational resources. Influenced by the unitary school-running system in the past, the concept of "learning at governmental schools" is very popular. However, independent colleges have been connected with many prejudices such as "high enrollment fees", "creating unfairness in education", and "profit pursuing institutes". There are four popular opinions on independent colleges: a) Variation. People support this opinion think that public ownership is the characteristic of socialist education. Since independent colleges are set up for making money, they are worrying that these colleges will change the quality of current Chinese socialist education. b) Unfairness. The opinion thinks non-governmental higher education starts the high tuition fees. Due to the imbalanced distribution of students' parents, high tuition fees will obviously bring unfairness in education. c) Unnecessary. The opinion thinks that open colleges and universities is the duty of the government and social power should not be involved in such thing. They think to develop independent colleges is definitely unnecessary. d) Objection. People supporting this opinion think most independent colleges have poor school-running conditions, especially low quality teachers, which cannot guarantee the quality of education.

Most evaluations upon independent colleges are negative which has pushed independent colleges into unfavorable situation and their teachers in awkward position. Many independent college teachers are shame of their identities and most people do not want to teach at independent colleges too.

### **2.2 Poor Implementation of Government Policies, Incomplete Supporting Facilities, and Teachers' Social and Legal Status Are Mismatching**

Independent colleges belong to the category of non-government-run schools whose legal position is very clear. Article 27 and 31 of "Law of the People's Republic

of China on Promotion of Privately-run Schools” stipulate that “Teachers and educates of privately-run schools shall enjoy equal legal status as the teachers and eductatees of government-run schools shall; The teachers and staff members of privately-run schools shall, in accordance with law, share equal rights with those of government-run schools in respect of professional training, appointment of posts, calculation of the length of service as a teacher or staff member, commendation and reward, and social activities.” The government of Chongqing further clarified the protection mechanism for independent colleges’ teachers’ legal status in 2008. “Chongqing government’s Opinions on promoting non-government education development” states that “the whole society should form a guarantee mechanism for protecting and perfecting non-government education teaching team”. That is to say, independent colleges should have equal legal status with public universities and colleges. However, teachers’ legal status in independent colleges still differs much from the public schools’ which is reflected as the follows: a) Teaching and administrative staff belong to people-run non-enterprise unit personnel, thus, their social insurances and personal taxes must be paid according to company standard but not the government-run institution’s. b) Teachers in independent colleges do not have the right to participate in teaching qualification assessment and their technical positions have been limited by their parent universities; c) teachers are hard to get research projects and their financial support is less than government-run universities’; d) teachers’ teaching experience and working age usually cannot be recognized by governmental employers; e) teachers’ training and social activities can barely get any help from the administrators. They usually get less rewards quota allocation and fewer chances for going abroad to study and other activities; f) there are huge gaps between teachers’ and their families’ housing compared with government-run college teachers’.

### **2.3 Parent Universities Cannot Perform Their Duties and Hardly Manage Independent Colleges’ Teaching Staff Construction**

The reason that government-run university runs an independent college is that independent college can make use of the parent university’s excellent resources such as teaching tradition, teaching resource, management mode, and huge amount of teaching staff. (ZHOU, 2003) According to Article 3 of “The Ministry of Education’s Several Opinions on Normalizing and Strengthening Regular Universities Run Independent College through New Mechanism and Model”, independent college’s parent university should be responsible for the teaching of independent college and manage it. In addition, the parent university should also make use of its intelligence and human resource advantages, and practically strengthen independent college’s teaching

staff and management team construction. However, the authors have found during investigation that parent university barely intervene in independent college’s teaching staff construction and management, not to say regular construction and management mechanisms. Parent University does not carry out their duties upon independent college on the matter of teaching staff construction and management.

### **2.4 A Systematic and Efficiency Regulatory Mechanism for Teaching Resource Allocation Has Not Been Established Yet**

Currently, a large group of independent colleges’ teachers are from retired or external teachers who are introduced by themselves or by other people to teach in independent colleges. This kind of teaching resource allocation has some problems such as spontaneity, blindness, and uncertainty. Although this allocation helped the development of independent colleges in the initial stage, the defects are also very obvious such as low information content, poor supply and demand channel, and uncertainty of talents. Therefore, on one side, most time independent colleges cannot find proper teachers, and on the other side, some teachers are difficult to get occupied. In addition, many external teachers of independent colleges are from government-run universities, thinking of parent universities interests, they are always restricted by them which is not good for teaching resources allocation and adjustment.

## **3. SUGGESTIONS FOR OPTIMIZING EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT OF TEACHING STAFF CONSTRUCTION IN INDEPENDENT COLLEGES**

### **3.1 Create A Social Environment That Shows Respect for Independent Colleges’ Teachers So That to Help Them Increase Their Sense of Approval of The Society**

Independent colleges which provide undergraduate courses for the society are non-government-run education. Non-government-run schools have the same nature with government-run schools. They are all quasi public products or services and also important parts of China’s higher education. (FANG, & WANG, 2011) Therefore, independent colleges’ teachers should also earn respect from the society. First, we should advertise their important position and function, pay equal attention to independent college teachers, and form a good environment for caring, supporting, and valuing independent college teachers. Second, open colloquiums for spreading outstanding deeds of independent college teacher, launch teaching contests among them and appraise and elect “best teachers”, increase independent college teachers’ publicity, build a good social custom which respect independent college teachers.

### 3.2 Construct and Complete Personnel Laws and Regulations to Protect Legal Interests

The government must complete related policies and supporting facilities construction on time when face new situations of teaching staff development. Besides, competent departments should strengthen the power of implement related policies and laws. The government should carry out teaching staff construction policies for independent colleges transferring into ordinary colleges or universities, strengthen personnel system and social guarantee system innovation and reform and make sure they are truly implemented, create fair policy environment, further eliminate unfairness in salary, wage, social benefits, social security, teaching training, post employment, working age calculation, rewards, and public activities.

### 3.3 The Government Should Increase Financial Support for Independent College Teaching Staff Construction

Independent colleges are mainly run by students' tuition fee which makes the insufficient school running cost a big problem for many colleges. Therefore, the government should increase financial support for them from the following aspects:

(a) Set up special funds for independent college teacher training and provide more opportunities for independent college teachers to engage in advanced studies and trainings. Due to expenditures and teachers' affiliations, most independent colleges do not take out related fees and measures for teachers' training. Thus, the government can put certain amount of special funds to teachers' further study and training in independent colleges.

(b) The government can add independent college teachers' affiliation into public institution category. Manage independent college teachers' affiliation scales, allocate symbolic funds for teachers properly, apply government institutions' standards for teachers in their social insurance and taxes, and also carry out preferential policies.

(c) Allow independent college teachers buy economically affordable housing which is only offered for public universities' teachers in some areas.

### 3.4 Set Up "Parent University - independent College" Supporting Mechanism

Since government-run universities have longer history and government's financial support, they have gathered a great deal of teaching resources which have great experiences in managing and teaching. Due to the "family ties" with the independent college, the "parent university" has more responsibilities to help it and to establish a supporting link. First, "parent university" should strengthen teaching staff construction guidance for independent college and help it make available construction measurements in detail. Second, "parent university" need to pay more attention on the teaching

staff professional ability and ethics training, send excellent teachers to teach for certain period, and allow independent college teachers to learn some professional knowledge in "parent universities". Last, it is highly recommended that two schools exchange information in teaching and scientific activities frequently.

### 3.5 Establish Scientific and Efficient Teaching Resources Market Configuration and Regulation Mechanism

Education administrators should treat teachers as important production factor according to human resource development theory, follow the law of value, and set up teaching resources market configuration and regulation mechanism. The following steps can be adapted in detail:

(a) Guide and formulate reasonable teacher introduction plans. Independent colleges usually reduce the amount of teachers due to the reason of school-running cost. Therefore, education administrators should guide and approve teacher introduction plans and evaluate the scale of teaching staff according to different independent colleges' student amounts and current year enrollment plans.

(b) Establish independent college personnel exchange centre

Education administrators should establish "independent college personnel exchange centre", calls upon independent college teachers within its region to take part in teaching qualification identification and professional and technical qualification review, manage local independent college teachers' personnel archives and domicile information, create information exchange channel, and provide macro-control and micro guidance for personnel exchange.

(c) Expand teachers' qualification recognition to increase teaching resource

Diversified teaching resource is an important aspect of independent college teaching staff construction. First, break the wall between independent colleges and government-run universities in teaching resource exchange. Second, education administrators can make up certain policies to encourage public institutions or scientific research institutions to appoint working staff work at independent colleges. After taking teaching qualification examinations, these staff can get their certificates.

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