The Basic Models and Trends of Academic Governance in European Universities

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Abstract: University governance is a very important research topic. As the main venue for academic activities, universities are full of two completely different powers. They are academic and administrative powers. The main goal of optimizing the academic governance structure of universities is to achieve resonance between academic power and administrative power. The aim of this study is to analyze the basic patterns of academic governance in European universities, combined with changes in the academic governance environment, and to elucidate the trends in the transformation of academic management structures in European universities. The governance of European universities can provide some inspiration for the governance of Chinese universities. This study suggests that university governance in China can be governed through independent governance structures, academic freedom and independence, diverse participants, transparency and accountability, and international cooperation and exchange. It can help Chinese universities improve their governance mechanisms, enhance the quality of education, and enhance academic freedom.

1. Introduction

Academic governance refers to a set of systems and rules designed by academic stakeholders around academic affairs, based on the laws of academic development, for academic production. It includes the overall framework and operational mechanism of academic governance. As the main venue for academic activities, universities are filled with two completely different types of power. They are academic and administrative powers. The main goal of optimizing the academic governance structure of universities is to achieve the resonance between academic power and administrative power in the same direction. This study aims to analyze the basic patterns of academic governance in European universities, combined with the changes in the academic governance environment, and to elucidate the trends in the transformation of academic governance structures in European universities.

2. The Basic Model of Academic Governance in European Universities

There are two basic structural patterns within academic governance: corporate governance and bureaucratic control. They mainly focus on the dual relationship between academic power and administrative power to solve problems such as "who makes decisions" and corresponding structural design and institutional arrangements. In terms of their essence, the academic governance of

European universities can be roughly divided into three models: professional bureaucracies, community governance, and hierarchical regulation.

2.1 The Professional Hierarchical System

The internal bureaucratic structure of universities is mainly divided into the traditional formal administrative bureaucratic structure and the professional bureaucratic structure composed of academic colleagues. [1]The traditional administrative hierarchy tends to formalize and standardize organizations, emphasizing formal communication channels, clear power and responsibility relationships, and organizational centralization. The professional hierarchy emphasizes making equally effective responses under conditions of decision-making decentralization, power decentralization, and democratic participation. What sets the professional hierarchy apart from the administrative hierarchy that focuses on centralization and supervision. The power of universities is dispersed among the teaching positions of grassroots departments. The legitimacy of professional hierarchy stems from the decentralization of disciplines within departments. [2]Therefore, there is a significant difference in the degree of organization between the administrative and professional levels within universities. It mainly focuses on formal organizational command chains, role differences, standardization, and systematization processes at the organizational level. The professional departments of universities focus on informal decision-making, consensus building, peer community, and interpersonal interaction.

The administrative hierarchy is vertically decentralized. A formal power chain is formed from top to bottom. The professional hierarchy emphasizes horizontal decentralization of power. It emphasizes the informal flow of power outside the vertical formal power chain.[3] The professional hierarchical structure manifests as horizontal development and horizontal structure. Academic managers possess professional authority derived from professional academic skills.[4]

2.2 The Collegial Governance

In the field of academic governance in universities, community governance, which has lasted for centuries, has been regarded as the cornerstone of university governance and the main mode of ensuring the effective operation of academic organizations. The so-called community governance refers to the fact that professional scholars or their representatives make important decisions through a consensus decision-making process, and the negotiation process of community governance is difficult to avoid being time-consuming and the decision-making process is slow. [5]The main concepts, values, and traditions of community governance are based on the professional academic authority and influence of scholars from different disciplines. Scholars participate, cooperate, negotiate, discuss and reach consensus on an equal basis in a collective form. Conflicts in academic decision-making can also be resolved through discussions based on consensus. Consensus and democracy based on professional academic authority are inherent characteristics of community governance models, but it is difficult to quickly make positive and effective decisions or responses to the complex environment of academic governance.

2.3 The Bureaucratic Control

Bureaucratic control is a form of organizational control that relies on a hierarchical structure and a set of formal rules and procedures to regulate and coordinate activities within an organization. It is based on the principles of bureaucracy, which emphasize clear roles, defined responsibilities, standardized processes, and centralized decision-making.

In bureaucratic control, authority and decision-making power are concentrated in the hands of top-

level managers or administrators who establish rules, policies, and procedures that guide the actions of employees. These rules are designed to ensure consistency, uniformity, and adherence to organizational goals and objectives. In the past, the administrative decision-making model of universities followed a top-down administrative order. However, academic decision-making within universities is still dominated by "collegial governance". With the transformation of the relationship between government and academia and the reduction of government financial support, the academic governance environment inside and outside universities has changed, and the traditional bureaucratic regulatory model has shifted towards a new management model that focuses on effective organization and management. The tools and technologies used by public administration and the administrative departments within universities to indirectly regulate academic decision-making are more covert and diverse. In order to more effectively cope with external environmental pressures, better access to resources, and reduce university operating costs, a new hierarchical system has been formed at various levels within the university, including schools, colleges, and departments, which is different from the traditional administrative hierarchical system. They enhance the role of senior administrative managers and indirectly achieve the goal of upward centralization of administration by cultivating the individual power of administrative management organizations and their actors within the university.

Key features of bureaucratic control include:

1) Hierarchy: Bureaucratic control is characterized by a clear chain of command, with each level of management having authority over the level below it. Decision-making and control flow from the top down, with higher-level managers overseeing and directing the activities of lower-level employees.

2) Formal rules and procedures: Bureaucratic control relies on explicit rules, policies, and procedures that govern the behavior and actions of employees. These rules provide a standardized framework within which employees are expected to operate and make decisions.

3) Specialization and division of labor: Bureaucratic control involves the division of work into specialized tasks and the assignment of employees to specific roles based on their expertise and qualifications. This division of labor helps ensure efficiency and expertise in carrying out tasks.

4) Standardization and consistency: Bureaucratic control seeks to achieve consistency and uniformity in the application of rules and procedures across the organization. It aims to eliminate variations in performance and ensure that tasks are completed in a standardized manner.

5) Centralized decision-making: Bureaucratic control concentrates decision-making authority at the top of the organizational hierarchy. Important decisions are made by top-level managers based on their authority and expertise, with lower-level employees primarily responsible for executing those decisions.

While bureaucratic control can provide stability, clarity, and efficiency within an organization, it can also be criticized for being rigid, slow to adapt to change, and potentially stifling innovation and creativity. Organizations often seek to strike a balance between bureaucratic control and more flexible, adaptive forms of control to meet the challenges of a dynamic and rapidly changing environment.

3. Changes in the Academic Governance Environment of European Universities

This study suggested that academic governance in universities is not an isolated existence. It is situated within a triple environment of macro perspective, micro policy, and micro organization. University governance must actively respond to environmental changes and challenges.

3.1 Macro Perspective: Competition in the Global Knowledge Economy

With the strengthening of the globalization trend of knowledge economy and academic

competition. Since the 1990s, the internationalization of higher education has gradually replaced the concepts of "international education" and "international cooperation". Universities play an important role in talent cultivation, high-tech innovation competition, and global comprehensive national strength enhancement in the development of the new economy. Therefore, globalization of higher education has become an important strategy for participating in global knowledge economy competition and enhancing comprehensive national strength. Globalization of higher education has become the most fundamental challenge faced in the history of higher education.[6]Under the multiple pressures of reduced government financial support, expansion of enrollment in higher education, and questioning of the efficiency and effectiveness of university operations by the government and society, the public responsibility undertaken by universities has expanded. Universities are no longer seen as ivory towers independent of socio-economic development, but tend to be formalized and generalized. The universities that were once located within the "ivory tower" are gradually moving from the "edge" of global knowledge economy competition to the "core".

3.2 Mid-evel Policy: Marketization of Higher Education

Driven by global knowledge economy competition policies, the development of higher education in Europe has shifted from government control to market-oriented driving. The government has reduced public financial expenditure on higher education and changed unconditional financial support policies to meet complex socio-economic needs and expectations. Universities must prove their usefulness in open market competition. Academic governance follows the effectiveness value of resource allocation, resource utilization, and resource output. The competitive gap in resource acquisition between universities, colleges within universities, and disciplines within colleges is gradually widening. Universities have intensified the phenomenon of stratification and differentiation.[7]

The government has also shifted from a "big government, small individual" to a "small government, big individual" operational model to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education supply.[8]The government utilizes market competition, incentives, and performance evaluation mechanisms. Universities focus on educational outcomes, performance indicators, basic standards, performance funding strategies, and student learning accountability. [9]Universities are forced or tempted by conditional financial aid policies to trade academic freedom and autonomy with financial aid, and remotely regulate the decision-making orientation and preferences of universities. It weakens the substantive autonomy of universities.

3.3 Micro organization: Academic Performance and Quality Evaluation

Under the joint influence of global macroeconomic competition and government marketization policies, university organizations have strengthened academic performance evaluation and quality assurance. Academic quality assurance, output monitoring and evaluation, accountability, and audit mechanisms are becoming increasingly prevalent in universities worldwide. On the one hand, universities aim to better and faster respond to the complex environment and demands of external governance. The implementation of goals, performance indicators, contracts, and output monitoring in universities has enabled senior administrative managers to gather more administrative power. The decision-making scope and actual influence of academic governance organizations have been reduced. On the other hand, the reform of academic governance in universities under the guidance of management ideology has increased intervention in the tradition of academic autonomy and freedom in universities. The external academic performance evaluation led by "quantification" and "standardization" in universities resonates with the expansion of administrative power within the university. The value and goals of academic governance outside universities are achieved through

explicit academic performance evaluation mechanisms.

4. The Transformation Trends of Academic Governance in European Universities

In order to respond more flexibly and effectively to the requirements and challenges of multiple academic governance environments, the academic governance structure of European universities has been adjusted either actively or passively. From the external public policy structure of university academic governance to the internal organizational structure of university academic governance, and then to the micro governance behavior of complex actors. It reflects the trend of top-down academic governance structure reform in European universities.

4.1 Policy driven: government deregulation and decentralization, conditional financial support

Governments in various European countries have relaxed their control over universities. They adopt various market tools to adjust the relationship between government, market, society, and universities. Taking Germany as an example, under the federal system, the governance model of Humboldt University, represented by Germany, emphasizes that state governments are the center, and state governments bear the main responsibility in higher education. The Ministry of Education and Culture of 16 states in Germany is mainly responsible for the universities in each state, while the Central Federal Ministry of Education and Research is mainly responsible for the legal equality of universities and the fairness of students. Universities have dual organizational attributes of government regulation and academic oligarchy. Since the 1990s, the German higher education reform guided by the concept and technology of new public management has shown a relatively conservative characteristic. One is to introduce market or quasi market mechanisms, strengthen the allocation and competition of resources such as student sources and university reputation, and transform the mode of government regulation. The government's deregulation has enhanced the autonomy of universities, shifting from a tightly hierarchical control model to an indirect remote control model using financial tools. Universities are more autonomous and flexible in managing and utilizing resources. The second is to leverage the role of performance evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms. State governments have transformed the traditional linear fiscal funding model into a total funding model through different forms of internal and external quality evaluation mechanisms. The state government's finance department is negotiating with various universities. The funding received by universities depends on the achievement of target performance. At the same time, university management departments have introduced quality assurance mechanisms in the field of teaching. Universities ensure the quality of teaching and research through internal student satisfaction surveys and external project certifications.

4.2 Organizational response: Academic power declining, administrative centralization strengthened

As the public policy environment for academic governance in European universities shifts towards market tools, indirect regulation, and performance evaluation. They emphasize the speed, efficiency, and effectiveness of academic decision-making in universities. Public administration policies have indirectly strengthened and driven the internal administrative power and centralization tendency of universities by wedging into the academic governance structure of universities through more covert means. As the financial aid model shifts towards conditional aid, the internal organizational management model of universities tends towards a goal oriented resource allocation model. A small number of strategic management organizations guided by rational goals in university management have become intermediaries responsible to the upper board of directors and connecting with the daily

academic organizations of the university. The selective financial assistance model of universities has strengthened the administrative centralization effect. The balance of university management power is gradually shifting towards internal administrative management organizations. The expansion of administrative authority and influence under the value orientation of management philosophy. The disorderly structure of traditional academic organizations has also shifted towards a management oriented governance structure or a market-oriented corporate governance structure. The dean and president within the university have more decision-making power. In the absence of the majority of the jury or teacher committee members, there is still the power to decide many issues. For example, the role of academic councils or academic committees in universities in countries such as the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark has undergone a fundamental transformation. They have transformed from previous decision-makers to providers of advice.

4.3 Behavioral regulation: professional commitment weakened, instrumental rational supervision highlighted

Universities are essentially complex organizations formed by diverse organizational actors with different goals connected to fluid and ambiguous power relationships. Driven by external market-oriented public policies and the rational governance structure of university organizations, the spontaneous collective collaborative action model embedded with diverse and complex value norms and standards within universities has been replaced by the organized close cooperation and control cooperation model. Therefore, the professional academic commitment inertia under the College governance model. It promotes the development value and willingness of disciplines that are conducive to more academic output. The governance of universities is gradually shifting towards a managerial oriented corporate logic and the role of professional managers. By externalizing performance evaluation standards to professional scholars, compare the degree of matching between idealized expected outcome settings and goals. Universities coordinate and regulate their teaching behavior through a detailed indicator system that includes subject rankings, the number of academic papers published, the number and amount of funding projects received, and the number of students being guided and trained. Administrative managers audit and evaluate the academic output, quality, and achievement of performance goals of professional scholars. Performance evaluation management tools have differentiated professional academic communities. It exacerbates the distrust of professional academic communities towards administrative managers.

5. Suggestion

The governance of European universities can provide some inspiration for the governance of Chinese universities, although there are certain differences in their backgrounds and cultures. This article believes that there are five aspects of university governance in China that can be borrowed from European universities.

1) Independent governance structure

Many European universities adopt a decentralized governance structure, dispersing power to different institutions and departments. This helps to ensure diversity and transparency in decision-making, avoiding excessive concentration of power. Some universities in China may consider adding more independent institutions and participants to their governance structures to improve the quality and fairness of decision-making.

2) Academic freedom and independence

European universities place great emphasis on the principles of academic freedom and independence. Teachers and students have the right to conduct academic research and express their opinions without political or economic interference. Chinese universities can place greater emphasis

on the protection of academic freedom, encourage academic diversity, and foster an environment of free thinking.

3) Diversified participants

The governance structure of European universities typically includes representatives from teachers, students, and administrators, as well as the participation of external stakeholders. This diversity of participants can ensure a balance of different interests and promote the exchange of opinions and the establishment of consensus. Chinese universities can consider expanding the scope of participants, including teachers, students, and off campus experts, as well as social organizations related to universities.

4) Transparency and accountability

European universities typically focus on transparency and accountability, publicly disclosing important decisions and financial information. This helps to establish trust and ensure the fairness of decision-making. Chinese universities can strengthen information disclosure and accountability mechanisms, improve transparency in decision-making, and accept supervision from both internal and external sources.

5) International cooperation and exchange

European universities attach great importance to international cooperation and exchange, actively establish cooperative relationships with universities in other countries, and promote academic exchange and knowledge sharing. Chinese universities can strengthen cooperation with international universities, attract more international students and teachers, and improve the quality of education and international influence.

This study suggested that some experiences and insights can be drawn from the governance of European universities. It can help Chinese universities improve their governance mechanisms, enhance the quality of education, and enhance academic freedom.

Acknowledgement

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