

Comparative Analysis and Enlightenment of Higher Education Policies between China and the West from a Comparative Perspective

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Abstract: *On the path of education advancement, higher education policies are constantly adjusting with the situation, focusing on the background of globalization and modernization of higher education. The higher education policies of the East and the West have clearly presented two different development models. In this regard, this article will take the evolution of higher education policies in the East and the West as the starting point, deeply analyze the core dimensions of higher education policies in the East and the West, and carry out relevant enlightenment thinking, aiming to provide theoretical references and practical inspirations for promoting the high-quality development of higher education in China.*

Keywords: *Comparison between East and West; Higher Education Policies; Comparative Analysis; Enlightenment Thinking*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, higher education policies, as the core carrier of national education strategy, affect the quality of talent cultivation and the direction of educational development. Especially in the face of the increasingly fierce international competition and the booming development of the knowledge economy, a more systematic comparison of higher education policies between China and the West and analysis of their similarities and differences is not only beneficial for clarifying the unique advantages and practical challenges of China's current higher education development, but also for extracting key wisdom from the vast international experience, thus providing relevant scientific basis for improving the relevant policy system and promoting the modernization of education in the future.

2. The Evolution of Higher Education Policies in China and the West

From the perspective of China's higher education policies, it has undergone a complex process of transitioning from a planned economy to a market economy. As early as the early days of the founding of the country, a highly centralized management system was established by drawing on the Soviet model, mainly focusing on serving the national industrialization strategy; After entering the reform and opening up, the focus of policies gradually shifted towards restoring the college entrance examination and expanding the autonomy of universities. After entering the new era, with the construction of the "Double First Class" and the successive introduction of policies such as educational evaluation reform, the focus will be on the enhancement of internal development and international competitiveness; On the other hand, Western higher education policies have gradually shown a diversified feature, with European countries focusing on welfare systems, constructing various models dominated by public education, and then introducing them into market mechanisms through the New Public Management movement. [1]The United States, on the other hand, has always emphasized the freedom of private higher education and academia, and in practice, continues to promote further integration of industry, academia, and research through the canvas of the Morrill Act. Since the 21st century, countries have begun to focus on strengthening the social services and innovation driven functions of higher education, gradually forming differentiated development paths. It can be said that the evolution of policies in both the East and the West will be influenced by their respective political and economic systems, while also reflecting common goals in addressing the challenges of globalization. [2]

3. Comparative Analysis of the Core Dimensions of Higher Education Policies in the East, South, and West

3.1 Comparison of Policy Objectives and Value Orientations

From the perspective of China's higher education policy, its core goal of serving the country emphasizes the political attributes and social functions of higher education. Especially through the 'Strong Foundation Plan', more top talents in basic disciplines will be selected and cultivated, laying the foundation for technological self-reliance and self-improvement; The release of the so-called Excellent Engineer Training Program aims to meet the practical needs of the current high-end manufacturing industry and the strategic emerging industries of the new generation of information technology, thereby further promoting the deep integration between industry and education; When implementing various measures such as the basic capacity building project for universities in the central and western regions and optimizing the regional allocation policy for university enrollment, it is necessary to take into account the fairness and quality improvement in the field of education, which will inevitably promote the balanced development of higher education. [3]

When looking at Western higher education policies, what they value is individual development and market demand. For example, in community colleges in the United States, the establishment of transfer mechanisms can provide students with low-cost and highly flexible pathways for further education, which will comprehensively promote individual career development and academic advancement; Under the "dual system university" model implemented by Germany, emphasis will be placed on closely integrating enterprise practice with academic education, achieving precise alignment between talent cultivation and the labor market. When facing the value orientation, considering China's collectivist oriented resource allocation, it is necessary to concentrate resources on building high-level universities through methods such as central government special funding and selection of "Double First Class" construction lists. However, the West has always advocated for diversified competition within the framework of liberalism, such as the market-oriented reform of tuition fees in universities in the UK, and private universities in the US relying on the transformation of scientific research achievements and alumni donations to independently raise resources. These differences will profoundly affect the allocation of policy resources and the boundaries of university autonomy. [4]

3.2 Comparison of Policy Implementation Mechanisms

From the perspective of China's standards for policy implementation mechanisms, the main focus is on building a three-tier administrative led implementation system consisting of the central, local, and university levels. In this system, the central government will establish the main direction of reform by issuing a series of policy documents such as the "Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Education Evaluation in the New Era", while local governments will formulate supporting measures based on regional needs, and universities will gradually implement national strategies through project applications. Just as the construction of "Double First Class" universities will rely on administrative instructions and resource allocation to jointly promote the development of key disciplines. However, under this system, there still exists a lack of flexibility in policy implementation, with some universities overly relying on administrative instructions and unable to respond quickly to market changes. Some Western countries generally adopt a pluralistic co governance model. Among them, the UK Higher Education Funding Council implements performance funding by establishing the Teaching Excellence Framework and the Research Main Framework; The federal government in the United States indirectly intervenes in higher education through research funding and student aid through institutions such as the National Science Foundation.

In addition, from the perspective of evaluation mechanisms, China has always been based on an administrative system with periodic reviews, just like the review and evaluation of undergraduate teaching work. Some Western countries, on the other hand, place great emphasis on certification systems led by third-party organizations. Taking the Central American Association of Colleges and Universities as an example, according to multidimensional standards, the certification results will inevitably affect the reputation and resource acquisition of universities, thus forming a market-oriented supervision mechanism. At the same time, some Western universities will also comprehensively achieve the common governance goals of stakeholders through channels such as board of directors and academic committees, while at that time, various universities in China still need to continuously improve their academic autonomy and social participation mechanisms. [5]

3.3 Comparison of Policies in Key Areas

When comparing and analyzing fiscal policies, China mainly relies on government investment, with a focus on 2023. The proportion of national fiscal education funds to GDP has exceeded 4% for ten consecutive years. Its key support projects are the construction of "Double First Class" and the development of basic disciplines, with the aim of continuously narrowing the gap in educational resources between regions through special transfer payments. However, the West focuses on forming a diversified funding pattern, among which some private universities in the United States are entering a stage of independent development with their own donation funds of over 50 billion US dollars and research contract income, while Australia is implementing a contribution plan for higher education and has implemented student loans to alleviate financial pressure.

At the same time, in terms of talent cultivation policies, China has mainly strengthened the standardized cultivation of talents through adjustments to professional catalogs, curriculum ideological and political reforms, and other means. It has also added new emerging majors such as artificial intelligence to meet the actual needs of the industry, and promoted the integration of value orientation into the professional teaching process as much as possible. However, some Western countries seem to place more emphasis on personalized development forms, just as multiple EU countries promote cross-border mobility through a unified credit system; At that time, American universities aimed to support students in independently designing courses by implementing a combination of general education and professional models. When it comes to internationalization policies, China vigorously implements the Study in China program and promotes international cooperation, while many Western universities attract students from an international perspective to seize the global education market through cross-border involvement. This also means that some Western countries have inherent advantages in building international academic discourse power. [6]

4. Reflection on the Enlightenment of Western Higher Education Policies on Chinese Higher Education Policies

4.1 Innovative direction adjustment of policy concepts

From the current perspective, the formulation of higher education policies in China must break through the traditional fixed thinking guided solely by national strategy, and establish a composite ideal system that takes into account both collective needs and individual values. During this period, it is possible to effectively draw on the Western educational philosophy of "student-centered" and focus on incorporating personalized development needs into the core policy objectives. For example, by promoting the evaluation of learning outcomes portfolio, using the portfolio as a carrier to record in detail the growth trajectory of each student in academic practice and innovation at multiple dimensions, it can replace traditional quantitative assessment. At the same time, as policy makers, it is necessary to gradually strengthen the dynamic adaptability of policies and establish a relatively complete closed-loop mechanism for demand perception, policy response, and effectiveness feedback.

In addition, it is necessary to effectively refer to the regular review system in the EU's higher education policy, and establish an annual evaluation and mid-term adjustment mechanism for higher education policy that is exclusive to China. In the process of establishing and implementing this mechanism, emphasis should be placed on combining dynamic information such as labor market data and graduate tracking surveys to timely optimize key policies such as professional settings and enrollment plans, thereby achieving precise alignment between education supply and social demand. [7]

4.2 Optimization strategies for institutional design and improvement

In the new era, China's higher education management departments must focus on the introduction of market-oriented mechanisms and the improvement of the flexibility of related systems, and further improve the functionality of China's higher education policies through optimizing institutional design. For example, in terms of resource allocation, the management department can try to refer to the operating model of the American University Foundation and establish a national level higher education donation incentive fund. Whether it is corporate donations or individual donations, they should be given honors and commendations related to tax exemptions, thereby continuously expanding the channels for social capital participation. During this period, efficiency also requires the establishment

of a distribution mechanism that combines performance-based funding and autonomous revenue generation, giving universities greater power to spend funds as much as possible, and ensuring that education funds are applied in practice.

In addition, regarding the talent cultivation system, management departments must break down traditional disciplinary barriers. They can try to learn from the "project-based learning" model in the German University of Applied Sciences, effectively promote interdisciplinary workshops and industry proposition courses, and other innovative forms to cultivate more versatile talents. At the same time, in the field of international institutional construction, management departments also need to actively participate in the development of OECD education indicators and international standard building activities such as World Engineering Education Alliance certification. More importantly, it is necessary to establish a risk warning and quality monitoring management platform for overseas branch schools based on actual needs. On the basis of continuously expanding the openness of education, the seven platforms will also ensure the overall quality of education and truly enhance the discourse power of China's higher education rules. [8]

4.3 Innovative Path for Improving Implementation Efficiency

Nowadays, the implementation departments of higher education policies in China must adapt to the development of the times, build a governance pattern with diverse and common characteristics, and continuously improve the effectiveness of policy implementation. In the process of construction, the implementing department can try to refer to the "Higher Education Policy Forum" model implemented in the UK and establish a normalized policy consultation mechanism composed of the government, universities, enterprises, and industry associations, but it must ensure that policy formulation can fully absorb practical needs. In the implementation of this policy, it is necessary to always implement the system of "policy experimental fields", and then carry out school enterprise joint training and credit bank reform pilot projects through regional or university selection, in order to continuously reduce the risks in the comprehensive promotion process. [9]

In addition, the implementing department also needs to effectively reform the relevant evaluation system according to policy adjustments. For example, we can try introducing the value-added evaluation method from the United States, which will track the difference in students' abilities between enrollment and graduation, and scientifically measure the effectiveness of higher education. Moreover, based on the establishment and application of the national smart education platform, a policy implementation big data monitoring system can be built, focusing on dynamic supervision and management of key indicators such as enrollment plan implementation and efficiency of various fund utilization, achieving efficient transformation from post audit to process control in policy implementation. [10]

5. Conclusion

In summary, from the current perspective, higher education policies in China and the West have shown distinct characteristics in different historical, cultural, and institutional environments. Especially through a systematic comparison and in-depth analysis between the two, not only can the institutional advantages of China's current higher education policies be clarified, but also the optimization direction in its reform process can be explored in depth. On its future development path, it still needs to be based on local policy practices, absorb international experience reasonably, and focus on improving the policy system, in order to effectively promote the goal of high-quality development of higher education in serving national strategies and meeting diversified needs.

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