

Multiple Logics: The Reality Dilemma of University Discipline Construction under High-Quality Development and Ways to Improve It

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Abstract: Discipline construction is crucial for the high-quality development of universities, as it shapes the evolution of the discipline structure and internal logic of macro development. This process mainly involves a three-tier logic encompassing government, university, and market dynamics. However, there are still some challenges in promoting university discipline construction. These include government resource allocation biases, disorderly competition in discipline construction, and misalignment between market demand and disciplines. To address these issues from a multi-system perspective, solutions can be implemented across three dimensions: Firstly, building a community of interest in discipline construction from a governmental standpoint; secondly, optimizing the environment for discipline development within universities; and finally expanding incentive mechanisms within the market dimension. By doing so, external support for university discipline construction can be established amidst the backdrop of high-quality development while continuously consolidating positive trends in university discipline development.

Keywords: multiple system logic; University discipline construction; High-quality development

1. Introduction

Discipline, as a crucial cornerstone for the survival and development of a university, forms the lifeblood of knowledge growth, guides the internal logic of university operation, and serves as the core driving force to promote the development of knowledge clustering. It is not only an inevitable requirement for the high-quality development of a university but also the sole means to enhance the level and quality of discipline governance. In recent years, China has successively formulated several policy documents addressing the critical issue of discipline construction. These include the Overall Plan for Promoting the Construction of World-class Universities and Disciplines as a Whole, Interim Measures for Implementing the Construction of World-class Universities and Disciplines as a Whole, Guiding Opinions on Accelerating "Double First-class" Institutions of Higher Learning Construction, and Opinions on Further Promoting World-class University and Discipline Construction. These policies have laid a solid foundation for advancing higher education in China to new heights. However, it is still necessary to deeply analyze discipline construction from multiple system logic perspectives in order to accelerate first-class discipline construction. Additionally, there is a need to thoroughly explore both its multiple impacts and values within universities' disciplinary ecological environment. This will help clarify further how university development relates internally with discipline construction while building external support for university discipline construction under high-quality development circumstances in order to consolidate positive trends in university discipline development.

2. Theoretical interpretation: The theoretical foundation and analytical framework of multiple institutional logics

2.1. Theoretical development: The theoretical foundation of multiple system logic

The concept of institutional logic was initially proposed by American scholars Roger Friedland and Robert R. Alford. It consists of a set of rules, cultural norms, and belief systems that collectively have a profound impact on human cognition and behavior.^[1] In brief, institutional logic refers to an arrangement and mechanism that guides and standardizes people's behavior through an internal logical framework. Over time, institutional research has garnered increased attention from scholars in the field. The new institutionalism school posits that each institutional order will establish its organizational

principles and arrangements based on its unique central logic, which then shapes the action mechanism and behavioral mode of the individuals involved.^[2] The research findings on institutional logic provide robust theoretical support for the behavioral choices of social actors in various institutional environments, and contribute to a deeper understanding of their action strategies and underlying rationale within the academic community. Renowned Chinese scholar Professor Zhou Xueguang has emphasized the existence of multiple forms of institutional logics in Chinese society, with large-scale institutional changes being driven by organizations and individuals from different interest fields based on their unique institutional logics through mutual influence and synergy. Furthermore, as a key concept within the institutional school, institutional logic specifically refers to the persistent institutional framework and action rules within a specific field. These institutional logics not only define boundaries for actor behavior but also significantly guide and shape their decision-making processes.^[3]

2.2. Trust-based relationships: the interplay of disciplinary identity and adaptation

It is imperative to clearly delineate the foundation, core, and supporting system of multi-system logic analysis when utilizing the theory of multi-system logic to address research issues in university discipline construction. The establishment of a logical subject serves as the fundamental prerequisite for applying multiple system logic theory. University discipline construction is a complex process involving various stakeholders such as government, university, and market, each formulating distinct action strategies within their respective institutional frameworks. Essentially, this reflects the profound influence of government administrative logic, university construction logic, and market demand logic on university discipline construction. Furthermore, focusing on the action mechanism of the logical subject constitutes the focal point of multi-system logic analysis. In this analytical framework, the focus should be on the dynamic interplay among various actors in the process of policy implementation, rather than solely focusing on the policy itself or its formulation. While the government has clearly outlined the requirements and specific measures for building "double first-class" disciplines in the new era, it is important to recognize that policy formulation does not directly lead to the realization of policy values and objectives; rather, it is influenced by multiple factors. Furthermore, establishing a connection between macro institutional arrangements and micro action subjects is essential for logically analyzing multiple institutions. It is crucial to examine actors within a broad social context and deeply analyze their interest relations and underlying mechanisms, instead of isolating them from reality. Only through this approach can we fully comprehend the operational logic of system dynamics and provide robust theoretical support for policy formulation and implementation.

In conclusion, it is evident that promoting university discipline construction is a dynamic evolutionary process embedded in real-world circumstances rather than a static state. Throughout this process, behaviors of various institutional actors continuously influence each other through interaction rather than existing in isolation. Therefore, it is imperative to deeply understand and grasp the interconnectedness and dynamic equilibrium among these actors in order to promote overall development of discipline construction.

3. Multiple logics: the operational logic of university discipline construction within a multi-system framework

3.1. Government logic

Government influence is the primary driving force behind the development of university discipline in the context of high quality. Throughout history, domestic university construction, school philosophy, and education reform have been heavily influenced and controlled by government will, with a clear administrative leadership trend. This is particularly evident in the establishment of top-tier universities, where there is a noticeable top-down "mandatory system change."^[4] In fact, the logical dimension of government involvement in university discipline construction under the backdrop of high quality can be observed from two aspects. Firstly, the government exercises executive power over university management. At each stage of discipline construction, various policy documents issued by relevant state management agencies play a crucial "catalytic" role and continue to promote the system and practice of first-class universities through administrative power. For instance, policies such as the Several Opinions on Further Promoting the Construction of World-class Universities and First-class Disciplines promulgated in 2022 serve as direct driving forces for the formation, promotion, and even reform of first-class universities' construction. Essentially, these policies highlight the government's

urgent pursuit of frontier research and efficiency in discipline construction; they give birth to the main theme of discipline construction through policy documents. Secondly, the administration of the university's internal management mechanism is worth considering. The underlying power logic of university discipline construction still originates from the government, as Party secretaries and presidents of universities are appointed by their superiors. Therefore, the internal management mechanism of universities demonstrates an administrative management mode, which is closely associated with the government's aim to maximize the ratio of input and output of educational resources. The administrative mode for managing the discipline construction of universities is beneficial for the government in coordinating resources and reducing the time cost of democratic management. Additionally, administrative authority also facilitates the promotion and implementation of policies.

3.2. University logic

University logic means that university is the carrier of discipline construction, and its purpose is to promote the high-quality development of university. Wilhelm von Humboldt, a famous German philosopher, once made it clear that the goal of running a university is to "pursue the highest form of pure knowledge", so the educational concepts of "academic freedom", "teaching freedom" and "the combination of teaching and research" have almost influenced all modern universities. In essence, the most crucial support for university academic activities lies in scholars' academic conscience, belief, and mission. The logical dimension of university discipline construction can be reflected in two aspects: Firstly, gathering resources to promote discipline innovation. In other words, universities should fully demonstrate the advantages of integrating discipline resources, breaking down development barriers, and innovating disciplines with a cutting-edge development perspective and resilience. Secondly, enhancing the core competitiveness of resource allocation. The government holds strong administrative authority over the allocation of resources for university discipline construction. Typically, government agencies have a set of systematic and sound assessment indicators. Only eligible universities can secure a place in the allocation of government resources.

3.3. Market logic

In the market, logic plays a crucial role in the high-quality development of university discipline construction. In a market economy society, the social adaptation of organizational functions is essential for organizations to thrive. Market logic plays a crucial role in the high-quality development of university discipline construction. In a market economy society, the social adaptation of organizational function is synonymous with market adaptation.^[5] In the context of academic production and the increasing commercialization of knowledge, universities are increasingly influenced by market logic. As a result, both educational and research activities in universities are shifting their focus towards the exchange value of knowledge rather than the traditional emphasis on its cultural or symbolic value. This shift places greater importance on the exchange value of knowledge in academic institutions.^[6] This concept of "Darwinian competition"^[7] highlights the market-oriented nature of discipline construction, also known as academic capitalism.^[8] This form of academic capitalism, driven by market forces, is primarily manifested in two dimensions. Firstly, it enhances the capital efficiency of discipline construction. Academic capitalism has significantly accelerated the transformation of knowledge production modes within universities, shifting from the traditional single-discipline research-based mode to a new interdisciplinary research-based mode. This transformation has led to a heightened demand for technical and applied knowledge in the market.^[9] This has provided a strong impetus and vitality for the high-quality development of university discipline construction. Additionally, market demand plays a crucial role in shaping the direction of discipline construction within universities due to the rapid advancements in scientific and technological innovation. The market demand serves as a significant driver for internal motivation within university discipline construction, thereby promoting its advancement. Therefore, it is essential for universities to establish a disciplinary governance system and structure that aligns with the specific characteristics of each discipline and diverse social needs. This will ensure accurate alignment between the development of disciplines and societal requirements.

4. Realistic Dilemma: The challenge of constructing university discipline under the framework of multiple systems logic

4.1. Imbalance in resource allocation: The government's input of resources is disproportionately skewed

The rational allocation of scientific resources is crucial to fully unleash the potential for discipline innovation. This not only promotes continuous innovation but also addresses the issue of uneven distribution of disciplinary resources. The formulation and implementation of disciplinary policies aim to enhance the country's comprehensive strength and scientific and technological competitiveness, as well as consolidate the government's legitimate position as the guardian of public interests. It reflects the government's thoughtful consideration of the country's long-term development and social well-being. However, in promoting high-quality development of university disciplines, there appears to be a certain degree of alienation in resource allocation by the government. The imbalance in resource allocation results in more high-quality resources being allocated to universities with superior disciplines, while universities with relatively weak development face scarcity and insufficiency of resources. This makes it difficult for weak disciplines to receive full support for their development and innovation. From a perspective of resource scarcity, disadvantaged universities struggle to obtain sufficient funds and organizational support through policies, leading to a trend where their discipline construction shows weakness, singularity, and marginalization within this competitive environment.

4.2. Common moral arrogation: disorderly competition in the construction of discipline

Tony Beecher and Paul Troeller compare disciplines to relatively independent "academic tribes" according to their cultural attributes.^[10] From the perspective of knowledge linkage, there exists a significant integration of knowledge between disciplines. The theoretical framework and knowledge content between disciplines play a crucial role in constituting the overall structure of a university, serving as the lifeblood and foundation for its existence. Therefore, members of the discipline community are expected to adhere to common discipline norms, demonstrating inherent academic ethics in their interactions with others within the field. It is essential for them to collectively resist any deviant behavior that undermines discipline development norms, as this serves as a fundamental moral code necessary for maintaining ecological health within the discipline and promoting its progress. However, current disorderly competition in discipline construction has led some universities to overly prioritize obtaining authorized master's or doctoral programs as symbols of successful discipline construction. This has resulted in an overemphasis on platform orientation, research projects and funds within disciplinary construction efforts. Additionally, there is an excessive reliance on "digital" indicators and management techniques while pursuing "short, flat and fast" operation paths for discipline construction.^[11] In summary, regardless of the stage of discipline development, it is essential for disciplines to adhere to the common ethics inherent in the knowledge ecology. Blind arrogance will only lead to a disregard for the interconnectedness between disciplines and result in disorderly competition in university discipline construction.

4.3. Lagging discipline innovation: the market demand does not align with the discipline

From the perspective of the relationship between social needs and discipline development, there is often an asymmetry between social needs and disciplines. This mismatch frequently demonstrates that market demand drives the innovation of the discipline, rather than the innovation of the discipline driving updates and iterations in market demand. On one hand, market demand dictates the growth of a discipline. As active participants in discipline construction, universities can emphasize the developmental value of discipline construction by accelerating the marketization of discipline development. Simultaneously, demand-driven market forces can facilitate resource reallocation. Under this guidance, research focused on technical disciplines and practical applications will experience rapid growth. On the other hand, within a context where knowledge production is applied situationally, only by integrating knowledge production and transformation processes into disciplinary innovation to form a close linkage relationship can disciplinary innovation be shaped as part of knowledge production and transformation processes. This integration promotes a close connection between disciplinary construction and marketization.

5. Promotion Path: Strategy exploration of university discipline construction under the logic of multiple systems

5.1. Government dimension: Building a discipline interest community

The discipline interest community is a cluster of disciplines formed within the university environment, with the aim of promoting the integrated progress of disciplines to facilitate the overall excellent development of the university. However, in reality, different stakeholders are involved in discipline construction due to their own goals, and they work separately without a unified collaborative mechanism. This situation leads to uneven resource distribution and blocked progress in discipline development, and sometimes even results in a dilemma. Therefore, it is essential for government departments to deepen their understanding of the service orientation of university discipline governance and effectively respond to the needs of higher education institutions in discipline construction. Cooperative governance should be embraced as the core concept to provide solid policy support for universities' discipline construction and ensure its steady development. In addition, government departments should proactively adapt to the new requirements of functional transformation and strengthen macro-control and overall development planning in the field of discipline governance. In practical practice, government departments should decentralize the authority to confer degrees, establish disciplines, and allocate discipline funds to lower levels. By improving and optimizing the discipline governance system, they should create a more relaxed and orderly institutional environment for the high-quality development of university disciplines.

Secondly, the government should carefully define the goal of discipline development, closely follow the internal laws of discipline development, and re-establish the independent discourse power of disciplines. Within the complex organization of universities, administrative power and academic power are intertwined; therefore it is necessary to eliminate excessive "administrative intervention" and shift focus towards constructing a disciplinary community guided by academic power. By clarifying and optimizing the power structure and boundaries of discipline governance, an ecologically balanced, harmonious, and symbiotic discipline governance system should be established to ensure that discipline governance truly returns to its academic essence.

5.2. University dimension: Optimize the development environment of disciplines

Disciplinary ecological environment is the basic environment for the high-quality construction of university disciplines, so a highly inclusive disciplinary environment will be more conducive to shaping the development of disciplinary construction. First, actively adjust the discipline management structure, aiming at building a harmonious academic ecology. Facing the challenges of the new era, the leapfrog development of higher education depends on the coordination and integration of discipline construction. This requires that while maintaining the balance between free exploration and orderly management, the discipline governance structure should be continuously optimized, and the value orientation from compliance to rationality should be gradually clarified and adhered to. From the perspective of multi-power participation in discipline governance, discipline governance needs to adhere to the core concepts of academic freedom and academic autonomy, and build a power structure that conforms to the logic of academic development. In order to promote the high-quality development of universities, it is necessary to clarify the legal status and power boundary of discipline governance to ensure the harmonious symbiosis and coordinated development between academic power and administrative power. Only in this way can we ensure the efficient operation of discipline governance and provide a solid guarantee for the overall progress of the university. Second, we should build an open discipline governance ecology. On the one hand, in order to promote the continuous progress of university academic culture, it is necessary to gradually adjust and optimize its core concept to ensure that the practical cultural concept can be deeply integrated into the research and application of knowledge. At the level of discipline governance, it is especially necessary to pay attention to the construction and improvement of knowledge transformation service system. This includes but is not limited to establishing specialized institutions such as school-enterprise cooperation offices and technology transformation offices in order to promote the effective transformation and utilization of application results.

On the other hand, it is necessary to build self-confidence in academic culture and promote a characteristic cultural concept that enables weak disciplines' advantages to develop. In college and university discipline governance, superior disciplines usually have more confidence than weak disciplines. Therefore, in order to build cultural confidence in weak disciplines, universities need to

cross organizational boundaries, delve into regional strategies and local situations to find unique advantages and characteristics. This will help weak disciplines form a clearer and more powerful cultural identity in self-positioning and development strategies so as to realize comprehensive improvement of discipline governance.

5.3. Market dimension: Expand the incentive reward mechanism

The renowned American psychologist B.F. Skinner once proposed that by precisely controlling relevant reinforcements, individual behavior can be effectively realized, flexibly adjusted, and deeply transformed. In general, it is possible to positively reinforce an individual's behavior in alignment with organizational goals through rewards in order to maintain and develop such behavior. Conversely, it is also possible to negatively reinforce an individual after the occurrence of negative behavior and reduce the occurrence of such behavior through punishment.^[12] The organizational department should implement the reward and punishment system for teaching and research institutions according to the performance evaluation results of discipline construction, which can be used as an important reference for the salary, honor and promotion of the unit or leading cadres, so as to achieve the purpose of process incentive and feedback, and further promote the continuous optimization and development of discipline construction. First of all, we should gradually establish and improve the incentive mechanism for discipline construction, improve the framework of reward and punishment policies, improve the efficiency of the use of discipline construction funds, encourage colleges and universities to actively explore discipline entrepreneurship and knowledge cluster innovation, design special incentive schemes for discipline research results, serve social development, and strengthen the cross-integration and innovative development of discipline construction and social development. Second, continue to strengthen administrative accountability: for units with low performance appraisal scores and poor performance of responsibilities, corresponding accountability measures can be implemented for the leadership team according to the scores, such as orderly inspection, criticism notification, administrative encouragement, work adjustment, etc. Specifically, at the local government level, the discipline development funds of local colleges and universities should be planned as a whole, and colleges and universities should be encouraged to actively expand financing channels and promote the construction of discipline clusters.

At the same time, local governments should promote deeper cooperation between universities and enterprises. They should also provide preferential policies such as tax relief and additional financial subsidies for graduates from universities and enterprises that have achieved remarkable cooperation results. This will increase the contribution rate of university discipline construction to society. At the university level, it is essential to establish extensive and in-depth cooperation with all sectors of society based on a deep understanding of national macro policies. This will create win-win relations and set up special research projects and funds for university-enterprise coordinated development. Additionally, a benefit-sharing mechanism for discipline input and output should be formed to optimize resource allocation. Ultimately, this will build a good interactive ecology between social enterprises and university discipline development in order to construct an effective platform serving social development.

6. Conclusion

In the new era, the key for universities to step into the first-class ranks is to promote the modernization process of discipline governance with high quality and build a new development pattern of discipline governance. Based on the present situation, it is urgent to clarify the foundation, core, and supporting system of the multi-system logic to explore the research problems of university discipline construction by using the theory of multi-system logic.

Looking forward to the future, the government, as an important organizational support and platform for discipline governance, should strengthen the subject status of the discipline academic community, actively promote in-depth development of discipline integration, and constantly consolidate high-quality development of higher education. In order to steadily improve high-quality prospects for university discipline development, promote leapfrog development of higher education, and promote collaborative processes with high quality; universities should build a good discipline development environment and actively explore upward discipline construction and development modes.

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