

Thinking and Analysis on the Developmental Prospect and Path of Chinese Private Universities in the Post-pandemic Era

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Abstract: *With the conclusion of the COVID-19 pandemic, China's private universities are facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities. This paper delves deeply into these emerging characteristics, discussing how they profoundly influence the evolution of higher education in China. During this pivotal transitional period, it's imperative for China's private universities to not only keenly capture new opportunities but also to demonstrate foresight and courage in innovation and reform. This represents not only a test but also an excellent chance to reshape themselves and adapt to the future educational demands. By proactively addressing and resolving these new challenges, they can not only carve out a unique and adaptive developmental path for themselves but also establish a new shining milestone in the long history of Chinese higher education, marking the continuous growth of private universities.*

Keywords: *Post-pandemic era; Chinese private universities; new opportunities new challenges; developmental prospect and path*

1. Introduction

Private universities are an important part of higher education in our country. Higher education goes hand in hand with the development of economy. With propelling of economic development, our country is in great need of various talents. Public higher education cannot nurture enough talents to meet the social needs in fast paced social development. Private universities and colleges emerge as the times require. With the outbreak of the pandemic, higher education are forced to be faced with other pressing problems such as online teaching, students management, upgrading teaching resources. How private universities break through these predicaments plunge educators into exploration and deep thought of finding solutions.

It has been six months since the COVID-19 pandemic ended in China and around the world, and China's economy, politics, culture, education and all walks of life are on the right track. However, as the post-pandemic era crept into us, Chinese people have suddenly realized that everything had changed completely and could not be reversed. As people's rationality returns, people's world, life and value views, market consciousness, consumption consciousness, self-consciousness and etc have presented new characteristics. Compared with the past, people cherish life more, cherish their families more, and are more self-aware, the characteristic of pursuing profit is prominent, and people believe firmly that their interest is first, and their self is first.

What should Chinese private universities do to survive and develop in the post-pandemic era? The founders of Chinese private universities have to clear the fog, get keener eyes, look far ahead and aim high, consider the future survival and development from the macro, medium and micro perspectives. They are supposed to combine the international and domestic market development needs, position themselves from the medium and long term program, take precautions and plan ahead, work hard, implement second entrepreneurship, step out of the development bottleneck period, and explore new developmental paths. In this post-pandemic era, Chinese private universities have not only gotten new opportunities for development, but also met new unavoidable challenges. Only when they bravely innovate and explore further, can they find a new way out.

2. New Opportunities for Chinese Private Universities in the Post-pandemic Era

2.1 Strong Support from National Policies

From the overall development, there is a stark diverge between public universities and private ones in educational level, quality of students and follow-up support. In reality, private universities have to put more resources to catch up with the level of public education. Under the external pressure of fierce competition, they have to extend and expand their developmental spaces to fight for more resources, which is also a inherent driver of the reform of private universities. From the aspects of policy, guiding their path to sound and sustainable development is the basis of empowering the governance system and capabilities, which is a external facilitator of private universities.

With the encouragement and support of national policies, Chinese private universities started from China's reform and opening up, grew up in the early 1990s', especially after the speech of 1992 south China inspection by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, that is, after China began to change from the planned economy to the market economy, and they expanded greatly after the year 2003 [1]. Presently, Chinese private universities have begun to witness quick groth, and their development across the country is thriving and getting strong. By the end of 2022, there are 773 private universities in China, including 436 undergraduate universities and 337 junior colleges, which are widely distributed [2]. Except for Tibet, all provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions have established their own private universities, and the number is positively correlated with the strength, economic and cultural development of public universities in different regions. The number of students also soared, reaching nearly 8.5 million. At the same time, China has also issued a series of laws and regulations to promote the healthy, standardized and sustainable development of private universities. Through the support of these national policies, Chinese private universities have stabilized the initial results of development and completed the "quantitative growth".

2.2 The Tradition that Chinese Families Attach Importance to Education Is Deeply Rooted in the Hearts of Chinese People.

Since ancient times, the Chinese have attached great importance to education, and the ancient people had the educational concept and cognition that "all things are inferior, only the learned rank high". In modern times, China suffered humiliation and torture due to Western powers' invasion, at the same time, it tried to improve education to become a powerful country, but it ultimately failed. After the founding of New China, the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the state recognized the importance of education, have made great efforts to develop education, cultivate science and technology talents, put forward the national policy of "education is the foundation of a hundred-year plan", and made nine-year compulsory education universal across the country. At present, the demand for education, talent and science and technology is more prominent and receiving higher education has been a target for students of every family. In the post-pandimic era, China's higher education has already entered the stage of popularization, and the enrollment rate of higher education has exceeded 50%, which is a great opportunity for the development of Chinese private universities. As far as students are concerned, this opportunity is precious, students are also strongly eager to seize this opportunity to change their fate and fulfill their dreams.

2.3 China Has Entered a Moderately Prosperous Society, and People's Living Standards, Incomes and Economic Strength Have Improved.

With the achievement of China's goal of lifting 20 million people out of poverty by the year of 2000, the Chinese have completely ushered in a moderately prosperous life, and their living standards and incomes have further improved. During this period, education, housing and medical care have become the main components of people's consumption. In the post-pandemic era, Chinese parents have realized that it is an inevitable trend to invest in education for their children, education is concerned mostly by parents and society, especially higher education, which is directly related to employment. Under the premise that parents have such economic strength, Chinese private universities has enjoyed new opportunities for development.

3. New Challenges of Chinese Private Universities in the Post-pandemic Era

3.1 China's Demographic Bonus Era Has Ended, and the Number of Students Enrolling at University Has Decreased

China's huge population base provides the manpower capital with competitive advantages in the early stage of reform and opening up, which becomes a favorable factor to attract foreign investment and promote the growth of Chinese foreign trade, and is also a key factor in the early stage of development of Chinese private universities. In the post-pandemic era, the age of demographic bonus has gone forever. Due to the increasing pressure of life, quite a number of young people are unwilling to get married and have children. Most of them only want one child and don't want more. Since 2015, China's population has shown a slowing growth trend. In 2016, the state issued the "two-child" birth policy, and in 2022, the state encouraged the "three-child" birth policy to encourage young people to have more children, but the birth rate continued to slow down and decrease. This means that in the future the enrollment rate of Chinese private universities will be greatly affected and the development of Chinese private universities will be challenged.

3.2 The Market Competition Is Becoming Increasingly Fierce

With the deepening and intensification of the enrollment expansion policy of colleges and universities, the market share of domestic and foreign school running institutions such as public universities, private universities, foreign universities and Chinese-foreign cooperative universities is increasingly becoming a competitive target. Among the more than 2,400 colleges and universities in the country, government-run public universities account for about 65% of the market, Chinese private universities (including independent universities) account for about 30%, while foreign universities and Chinese-foreign cooperative universities take up about 5%, showing the diversification of higher education providers and students' study channels. All universities seize students in the higher education market, which intensifies the competition for students, and the competitiveness for students for Chinese private universities is severely challenged.

3.3 High-end Education Demand Has been pursued Blindly

After three years of the novel corona virus epidemic, the market has unprecedentedly stimulated people's self-interest and profit-driven nature, and people generally pursue short-term interests characterized by "short and quick", abandon and ignore medium and long-term goals, wander in rationality and willfulness, and become confused and lose judgment. The higher education market is also the same, a large number of students and parents, regardless of their actual ability, chase unrealistic "vanity", want to enter the national key universities, such as "985", "211" universities or the first batch of undergraduate admission institutions. Otherwise, they choose to study abroad, totally ignore their actual conditions. At the same time, due to the late start, the pressure of economic cost and being relatively young of professional settings, Chinese private universities cannot meet the high-end education needs of such students, and do not take the advantage of students' choice in the higher education market. In addition, due to the long-standing social prejudice, the employment of students from private universities is also affected, which constitutes a new challenge for the development of Chinese private universities.

4. Thinking and Analysis on Developmental Path

4.1 Chinese Private Universities Should Strive for More Policy Support from the Regional Government and State, Such as Financial, Material and Enrollment Support, Diversification of Financing and Investment Channels, and Tax Incentives

Policy is the life of Chinese private universities, and they are the outcomes of policy and market economy. They are an important position and indispensable component of China's higher education, have grown from an "important supplement" to an "important component" of China's higher education, and have made significant contributions to the popularization of China's higher education and reform of China's higher education system. However, since their birth, they have been doomed to their identity of "private ownership", have congenital disadvantages in the market competition of socialism with Chinese characteristics, rely on the market to survive, and lack the same concern and care of the

government and policies for public universities. However, as private universities in China, they are also engaged in the field of higher education, and are completely different from other industries and businesses. Chinese private universities have the nature of "public welfare", and compared with public universities, they also play a huge function and role in cultivating successors for the socialist cause of China, training builders and workers for the motherland, and training talents for the national development and social progress. However, the main funds for the survival and development of Chinese private universities come from tuition fees, which account for about 85% of the funding sources, state support only about 10%, and social financing and donations about 5% [3]. Government support, social financing and donations have still been relatively weak, and the scale and depth of government and policy support should be greatly increased for them. Therefore, the state should present equal concern and strong support to the financial, material, enrollment and other aspects for them, and treat them equally; China should implement preferential policies in terms of taxation, give preference and care to them in social financing and investment, and ensure that they have sufficient financial resources under the premise of accepting government supervision and guidance in running universities, so that they have financial, human and material resources to accurately focus on national and local strategic needs, concentrate on their respective university positioning and medium-and long-term development plans, and make lasting efforts in order to achieve its mission and vision, to upgrade education and meet and serve the needs of the country and people.

4.2 Chinese Private Universities Should Speed Up the Connotative Construction and Establish Their Own Unique Characteristic Specialty Clusters

Chinese private universities have gone through more than 30 years of university-running experience, with their own distinct and unique developmental paths, and their university-running scale and development level have been well positioned and stabilized. The next goal should transform from scale development to connotational development, from quantity development to quality development, to improve university-running level, dig deeper connotation and characteristics, and achieve management, quality and results. Their aim is to reach "first-class major", "first-class discipline", "first-class university" and "world-class", to establish universities praised by students, parents, government with their satisfaction, recognition and trust at home and abroad. In order to meet the market demand for high-end higher education service of Chinese private universities, they need to accelerate the connotative development, and the establishment of high-level and high-quality universities is the only way to adapt to and meet the market demand. Connecting regional and local industries with the needs of economic and social development, they urgently need to solve the new issue of establishing specialty clusters of special disciplines that adapt to new technologies, new industries, new formats and new models, adjust specialty settings, promote cross-aggregation of disciplines and specialties based on demand, and build specialty clusters with disciplinary characteristics around industrial chains and innovation industrial chains for improving the degree of matching and achieving between Chinese private universities and the market [4].

4.3 They Shall Focus on the Future and Deepen Innovation in University Running Diversification and Marketization.

Facing the challenges of new scientific and technological revolution and intensified competition in the future, Chinese private universities need to explore university running diversification and improve their ability to resist risks. The path dimensions of entrusted training, joint training and cooperative education still need to be continuously explored and innovated, broadened and deepened. In addition, the development of their collectivization is a right solution. Education collectivization is to make them bigger and stronger, extend and expand the development of the education industry to its upstream or downstream, and also extend to related industries and industrial chains to open up new development space and dimensions. Furthermore, in the face of market demand and competition, they urgently need to strengthen the practical ability of talents, social practice ability, sustainable growth ability, vigorously cultivate students' pioneering and innovative spirit. Taking into consideration the standard national professional certification and teaching evaluation standards, they ought to implement the "dual certificate combination" graduation system of academic certificate and vocational qualification certificate[5]. They are to strengthen students' employability and workplace competitiveness after graduation, and enhance the quality of market-oriented talent cultivation and university-running brand effect and influence.

5. Summary

In the post-pandemic era, the new features of competition, innovation, integration and quality have become increasingly prominent, and the development of Chinese private universities has ushered in new opportunities and faced new challenges. With regard to the developmental path, Chinese private universities must externally seek more support and policy preferences from the state and the government; internally they need to promote connotation construction, build specialty clusters with characteristics, make in-depth innovation toward university-running diversification and marketization, and deepen reform to explore a new and unique path of success.

Pandemic exerts a far-reaching influence on the higher education, simultaneously, bringing about new opportunities and challenges. Through the intensification of digitization, counselling, tutelage and focus on international communication and cooperation, education equity of higher education, colleges and universities can better meet the social developmental needs of post pandemic era. It's believed that with the joint efforts and attention of universities and all walks of life, higher education will embrace a better future. University is an important carrier and promoter of a creative society and country. However, the outbreak of the pandemic makes higher education revolutionize the operation of paradigm of higher education. First of all, during the pandemic, students are faced with health problems from themselves and their families, as well as their studies and employment pressure. They are vulnerable to such problems as anxiety and depression. Though mental counselling and guidance, alleviating students' mental problems and riding out challenges from post epidemic era. At the same time. In the rigid economic recession inflicted by the pandemic, the job market has a bleak scenario, universities are supposed to play a bigger role in providing more guidance of career planning and internships, facilitating the integration of societies. In addition, universities can offer courses of job planning, leading students to realize their interests and strengths, making rational career path. Secondly, the pandemic weakened the international communication and cooperation. Universities and colleges are supposed to explore more channels of online communication and cooperation. By building virtual communication platforms such as online meetings and seminars, people can not only promote the development of academic research, but also embrace more extensive developmental opportunities. Through these efforts, students are endowed with broader global vision and horizon and cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, universities and colleges are supposed to pay attention to the educational equity. The pandemic exposes such issues as the inequality of educational resources. The insufficiency of educational resources in remote and poverty-stricken areas scream for the attention of government and universities and colleges. Some measures such as scholarship and grants are in urgent need to deal with these problems, improving the education of education deprived areas. Last, the training and allocation of faculty and better to ensure every student can receive quality education. Universities and colleges have the responsibilities of active explorations for development strategies in the era of post-epidemic, offering more quality education and development career opportunities to make greater contributions to our country.

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