

Governance Structure and Power Discipline of Higher Education Management

Qingxin Li

Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan, Hubei 430070

Abstract: At first, this paper analyzes the current governance structure of university education management, aiming at the problems that appear in the actual operation process of its internal power, proposes to train the power of the governance structure of university education management, in order to realize its operation to be more efficient, to further improve the current system and governance ability of universities and colleges, and to further promote the step of building our country's education power.

Keywords: University education; Power; Discipline

1. Introduction

Colleges and universities play a key role in training builders and successors of socialism with Chinese characteristics, making their stable development essential for talent cultivation. However, the blending and misallocation of political, administrative, academic, and democratic powers under Party Committee leadership have long hindered university progress. Thus, reforming the internal governance system is crucial for achieving steady development and building a strong nation in education, talent, and science. This paper analyzes the governance structure of China's higher education, examines its power distribution issues, and offers practical suggestions for improvement.

2. The governance structure and power analysis of higher education management

Since 2010, China has introduced policies addressing university governance reforms, responding to appeals from the higher education sector. In 2014, the CPC Central Committee emphasized the Party committee's core role and required university presidents to exercise administrative power according to law.^[1] This marked a significant step in improving the top-level design of university governance. During this period, the principles of "Party leadership, presidential responsibility, faculty governance, democratic management, and law-based administration" were established as key features of China's modern university system.

2.1 Party committee system and political power

Party committees serve as the leadership core in universities, guiding all aspects of university operations and determining development direction.^[2] They support the president's independent exercise of power while coordinating internal university affairs. University political power has two key characteristics: it is closely linked to state political power, with authority granted by the government and structures mirroring external political units. University political staff can be transferred to similar government roles. Additionally, party committees control leader appointments and hold influence over all administrative matters.^[3]

2.2 Administrative system and administrative power

The administrative power in higher education institutions is established by national laws and school regulations to manage internal structures and personnel^[4]. This top-down power is position-based, mandatory, and aims to implement national educational policies and achieve university goals. It is concentrated in school administrative departments, with a hierarchical, bureaucratic structure—higher positions hold more power. Top leaders make decisions, while middle and lower officials primarily execute orders. Emphasizing efficiency, administrative power operates through strict hierarchy^[5], with the president fully responsible for teaching, research, and administrative affairs.

2.3 Academic system and academic power

Academic power is a key element of university governance, but scholars differ in their interpretations. Some argue that administrative personnel hold academic power when involved in academic management, while others believe academic power arises from researchers' expertise and influence in specific fields, exercised through academic prestige. This paper adopts Lei Zhixiang's definition: "Academic power refers to professors and academic organizations independently managing academic affairs within their duties according to laws." Academic organizations include the academic committee, degree committee, and professor committee, responsible for consulting, reviewing, and deciding academic matters. Academic staff includes professors and scholars with prestige.

2.4 Faculty, student system and democratic power

China's universities generally set up the faculty congress and academic congress, teachers and academics through the congress to realize their democratic power. The trade unions, student unions and other organizations established in colleges and universities shall carry out their work in accordance with relevant laws and regulations and participate in the daily supervision and management of the university. Among them, the trade union, as a mass organization that teachers and staff voluntarily join, aims at safeguarding teachers' own interests and improving teachers' treatment. As an organization voluntarily joined by university students, the student Union participates in the management and supervision of the university by holding student conferences and submitting bills.

3. Governance structure and power discipline of higher education management

3.1 Problems and challenges of power discipline in university education management

3.1.1 The blurring of political power

China's law distinguishes between the responsibilities of university party committees and presidents, but the division is not detailed enough, leading to blurred power boundaries. This lack of clear operational guidelines results in unclear authority limits. The personal relationship between the party secretary and president often affects the effectiveness of the president responsibility system under Party leadership^[6]. Additionally, in practice, party and administrative systems frequently overlap, causing role conflicts and unclear responsibilities among leaders. This functional overlap makes it difficult to regulate power crossing boundaries.

3.1.2 The bureaucratization of executive power

Colleges and universities, as national institutions, are part of the national administrative system with clear administrative levels and personnel classified as civil servants. Their structure follows a top-down pyramid hierarchy, centered on administrative power, improving efficiency and policy implementation. However, this bureaucracy concentrates decision-making at the top, limiting grassroots initiative and innovation. Additionally, the prevalence of officialdom leads administrative staff to rigidly follow superior instructions, often neglecting to serve teachers and students, deviating from the original goal of supporting academic research^[7].

3.1.3 Marginalization of academic power

As centers of academic research, colleges and universities should prioritize teachers and scholars. However, key decisions on personnel training, specialty setting, and course offerings are often dominated by administrators, leaving scholars as passive executors. Studies indicate that 85.6% of respondents believe university decision-making primarily involves administrative staff, with academic staff mainly providing consultation. Only about 36.6% and 37.2% of academic staff feel they genuinely participate in the review and evaluation of teaching and research affairs^[8]. This highlights the highly concentrated power within universities, where administrative authority prevails, limiting the growth of academic power.

3.1.4 The nihilization of democratic power

In the internal decision-making of colleges and universities, administrative power occupies a dominant position, leading to the decay of democratic power. Although most universities have faculty assemblies and student congresses, actual power is often in the hands of administrators, formalizing the democratic process. Senior administrators have mastered the right to speak through system design and resource allocation, and the participation of teachers and students is relatively low. In addition, the system of teachers' congress in some universities is not perfect and lacks necessary norms, which leads to the vagueness of teachers' proposals and weak sense of participation, making democracy appear to be just a "formality".^[9]

3.2 Conduct power discipline on the governance structure of higher education management

3.2.1 Adhere to the leadership of the Party Committee and give play to the coordinating role of the Party Committee

In China's higher education governance, it is essential to uphold the president responsibility system under the Party committee's leadership, ensuring collaboration among political, administrative, academic, and democratic powers. The Higher Education Law mandates that state-run institutions implement this responsibility system under the Communist Party's primary committee leadership. The Party's leadership is irreplaceable in university governance, providing both political and institutional guarantees for the effective

functioning of the four powers within the internal governance structure of colleges and universities.

3.2.2 Implement the relevant legal system and university charter, standardize the operation of power

The university charter acts as the “constitution,” ensuring the internal system and relating closely to education management. It establishes important rules for university members and serves as the basis for social supervision. Implementing the charter and relevant legal systems is crucial for lawful power exercise. Negative lists and responsibility lists should clarify prohibited actions and associated responsibilities. By clearly defining power boundaries, operational efficiency can improve, ensuring the four types of power function within their scopes without overstepping authority. Additionally, personnel in each system must diligently fulfill the powers and obligations granted by law.

3.2.3 Improve the supervision system, build a collaborative governance model

To improve the internal governance supervision system in colleges and achieve de-administration decision-making, we must address the potential weakening of Party committee oversight by principals who hold dual roles. Strengthening supervision of administrative subjects and enhancing the Party committee’s collective decision-making is crucial. Encouraging teacher and student participation, along with attracting experts, supports the healthy development of academic and democratic power. We must also prevent the administration of academic power through necessary oversight. Finally, establishing a diverse supervision mechanism and expanding democratic channels will enhance public engagement in college management oversight via new media.

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