

## **Study on Establishing High-Quality Private Universities- Based on Exploration of Modern University System with Chinese Characteristics**

**Yang Hongbo<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The Outline of National Medium- and Long-term Program for Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) (shortened as the Outline) issued by Chinese government in July, 2010 put forward the improvement and reform of modern university with Chinese characteristics. The report in 18<sup>th</sup> NPC paid attention to the construction of modern university system, which makes establishing and improving modern university system necessary to accomplish education modernization.

**Keywords:** high-quality private universities; university system; Chinese government

### **1. Development of Modern University System**

The modern university system was originated from medieval universities of Western Europe in 12/13 centuries. The emphasis of “academic freedom” and “the unity of teaching and research” in the University of Berlin were identified as a pattern, thus developed in the University of Thaler, Bologna University (Italy), the University of Paris (France), Oxford University (UK). In America, the universities set up the board system and advocated the “3A the principle” (academic freedom, academic autonomy, and academic neutrality). Afterward, university autonomy was formed to prevent the interference of government, political parties, churches and other forces, so was academic freedom to ensure professors express their ideas freely and completely. Democratic management and scholars’ governance of universities were established to guarantee the equal status and power of scholars, as well as the university development in accordance with the majority.

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<sup>1</sup> Private Education Center, Xi’an International University Address: International Exchange Center, Xi’an International University, 408 North Zhangba Road, Xi’an, Shaanxi 710077, P.R. of China, Tel: +86-29-88751314, +86-29-88751484, Fax: +86-29-88751030, Corresponding author: yanghongbo@xaiu.edu.cn; 1986996183@qq.com.

After more than 600 years hard work, the basic framework of western modern university system was complete, gradually forming diverse management and development system, which guarantees the vitality of university.

## **2. The Connotation and Basic Elements of Modern University System**

Modern university system in a nation should be in accord with its history and culture. The current university system in china shows great differences in form and content from western university system. Universities are closely related to government, and government administrative function covers almost all areas of university.

Based on higher education policy in China, the modern university system with Chinese characteristics refers to the norms and orders of higher institutions adapted to meet the requirements of social development and match the characteristics of modern universities. Its basic elements refer to two aspects: the external system at the macro level reflects the relationship between university and government, university and society; the system at the micro level reflects the internal relationship between universities.

1. The basic elements at macro level. Modern university system at macro level is to regulate the relationship among the government, society and university. Its goal is to set up the higher education management system characterized by “legally running school, independent management, democratic supervision and social participation”, specifically speaking, including three aspects: transform government functions to make clear the power and responsibility of government; improve higher education regulations to further implement and expand higher education autonomy; actively promote social participation in university construction.

2. The basic elements at micro level. Modern university system at micro level includes four basic elements: party committee, academic committee, administrative committee and staff congress. The goal is to build up the effective internal management system to improve management structure and internal management, strengthen the construction of regulations and promote the professional evaluation.

Exploration of constructing and improving modern university system with Chinese characteristics is the internal demand of scientific development of modern university, at the same time, it is also the important content of Chinese higher education reform and basic task to reform internal system of higher institutions.

### **3. The Development, Current Situation and Contradiction of Chinese Private Universities**

The private universities came into being in the late Qing Dynasty. In the beginning of new China, there were 69 private universities, most of which earned a good reputation in the nation. After all private universities changed to state universities in 1952, there was a blank for nearly 30 years. With the Reform and Opening policy, the private universities emerged as the development of education and boomed in the country. According to the data from Chinese Ministry of Education, there are 676 (323 independent colleges) registered private universities (accounting for 35.4% of national colleges and universities), 4,767,000 students (accounting for 20.9% of the students in colleges and universities). It is estimated that the total assets of the private universities exceeds 300 billion RMB.

As a new body of higher education, private universities not only contributed a lot to the popularity of higher education, but also made positive explorations to the education reform. However, in the development of private education, the construction of university system lags behind, so some deep contradictions and problems has not been well solved.

#### **A) Non-Profit Property of Private Education Conflicts with for-Profit of Sponsor**

According to related Chinese policies, higher education can not be held for commercial purpose, but in order to attract more social capital to invest in education in a particular stage of economic development, a reasonable return cannot be completely excluded. According to research, the vast majority of private universities are motivated commercially. Although this is allowed by the relevant regulations, it is not clear about how to get a reasonable return, the proportion and procedures of reasonable return. This is caused by many factors: different accounting system adopted by private universities, imperfect governance structure, etc.

#### **B) The Relationship between Government and Private Universities Is Not Rationalized.**

According to Private Education Promotion Law, private universities and public universities are equal and should be entitled to independent operation. According to research, as the relationship between government and private universities has not yet been straightened out, the arbitrary governance and short-term behaviors are serious, mainly reflected in the following aspects:

- (1) Frequent excessive intervention in the operation of private universities.
- (2) Ineffective government supervision of the running of private universities.
- (3) The existence of discrimination in policy against private universities

**C) The Serious Lag of Teaching Staff Construction Became the Bottleneck Restricting the Development of Private Universities.**

The current teaching staff in private universities has the following distinct features:

(1) Compared with the full-time teachers, the proportion of part-time teacher is much higher. The proportion of part-time teachers in majority of private universities is more than 50%, even 80% in some universities.

(2) The pay of the teachers was poor. According to research, the salary of teachers retired in Zhejiang, Yunnan, etc is only about 1/3 or 1/2 of that in public university.

(3) The teachers' professional title evaluation is difficult. Only assistant can be evaluated in majority of private universities, while the evaluation of the titles above lecturers is strictly controlled by education administrative department, thus limited the teachers' professional development.

**D) The Reduction of Applicants Put Great Pressure on the Survival of Private Universities**

For most private universities, the sufficient number of applicants is the foundation to survive. In recent years, the number of high school graduates decreased gradually. For example, the number of candidates in 2010 fell by 6%, thus the steady decrease put pressure on private universities.

**E) The Investment in Talent Training Is Insufficient.**

Talent training is the basic task of higher education, but the investment is not enough because of various reasons, mainly reflected in the following aspects:

(1) Insufficient funds. The teaching facilities are in bad need to be improved in some private universities.

(2) Insufficient energy. Leaders, administrators and teachers in some private universities pay less attention to improvement of internal governance structure, students' management, and teachers' professional development.

(3) Insufficient attention from government. Compared with public universities, private universities lack systematic and effective measures in training presidents and key teachers, promoting reform in talent training, strengthening the teaching construction, etc. If government paid less attention to this, the sustainable development of non-governmental will be affected.

#### **4. Experience, Enlightenment of Private Higher Education**

The development of private higher education in different countries shows different features due to different culture, political system and education system, etc. Although China differs greatly in political system, culture, social development from western countries, we can learn a lot from the development of their higher education.

##### **A) Safeguard the Development of Private Higher Education with Legal System**

“Bill of Rights” and the Dartmouth College Case have great influence in the development of American private education. “Bill of Rights”, which ensured higher education run by individuals and communities was not subjected to the government intervention, is the foundation to the survival and development of American private education. In the Dartmouth College Case, the court clearly stipulated that state shall not interfere in independent operation of private university, which entitled private universities autonomy legally.

The important lesson drawn from Japanese private higher education is steadily improving related legal system. From 1899, Japanese government released various regulations and laws and formed complete legal system for private schools, which protected the private higher education and guaranteed the effective operation of private schools.

South Korea also attached great importance to the construction of legal system to protect private education. Many related laws were issued from 1948 to ensure the successful operation of private schools.

##### **B) Subsidize Private Universities with a Variety of Ways**

It is widely accepted that private universities (especially non-profit private universities) are important part of public services. Governments should treat private and public universities equally, guaranteeing its autonomy and providing financial support.

The support of American government can be roughly divided into three levels: federal, state, and local government. Federal support mainly includes three aspects: grants, low-interest loans and work-study program. The support of state and local government is mainly reflected in tax relief and providing scholarship for students. In 2002, 17.1% of the funding of non-profit private universities in America comes from government financial support.

The financial support of Japanese private universities mainly comes from the following aspects: central government, research, donations of individuals and groups, tuition and social services. Statistics show that financial support of central government accounts for 10.8% of the total funds of Japanese private universities.

From 1990s, South Korea gradually increased the financial support to private universities by direct and indirect assistance. Direct assistance includes the assistance to university and students. In 1990, the government promised to provide financial support to private universities and gradually increased the proportion of assistance.

### **C) Highlight Non-Profit Property of Private Higher Education**

The vast majority of private universities worldwide are non-profit. For example, many prestigious high-quality universities in America are private universities, such as Harvard, Yale, etc. In the year of 2002-2003 in America, 58.9% of American universities were private universities (the number was 2456), in addition, 67.8% private universities were non-profit (the number was 1665). American private universities had made great contributions to the development of society, economy, technology, etc. Take the "Ivy League" as an example, nearly 1/3 academicians and 80% presidents were graduated from the 8 private universities in this association.

In order to protect the non-profit property, government adopted diverse policies and regulations to supervise private universities. For example, the Ministry of Education in South Korea issued the program to improve the financial transparency and protect non-profit property of private universities. In east European countries (Hungary, Czech Republic, etc.), for-profit private universities must pay taxes while non-profit universities were tax-free.

The implementation of private universities being non-profit in western countries depends heavily on two essential factors. One is the tradition of donation. A large number of entrepreneurs are willing to donate to higher education. The other one is mature system. Private universities have relatively perfect financial management system to supervise the funds, thus avoid any individual or group making a profit from universities.

### **D) Establish Relatively Perfect Internal Governance Structure**

American practice in internal governance structure is very typical. The characteristic of American private universities is the independent operation with the board system. In general, the board of directors, the authority in private university, can decide the nature of university, regulations, personnel, and finance, even can dissolve the university.

### **E) A Major Force to Promote the Popularity of Higher Education**

The popularity of higher education is essential with the development of society and education. The developed countries (European countries, America, South Korea, and Singapore, etc) attached great importance to private universities to satisfy the demand of expanding higher education in the process of popularity of higher

education. In Japan, private universities provided over 70% of higher education opportunity, moreover, after WWII from 1947 to 1960, American private universities admitted 40-50% of the students nationwide. The developing countries, such as India, Brazil, also relied on private universities to promote the popularity of higher education, so does Taiwan.

#### **F) Establish the Mechanism of Quality Guarantee and Characteristic Development**

To establish and improve the mechanism of quality guarantee and characteristic development play an important role in education in foreign countries and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan regions. Generally speaking, although American private universities differ greatly in many aspects, most high-quality universities are private universities, which is closely related to government guidance. Public universities satisfy the demand of popularity of higher education, while private universities focus on the outstanding talent development and advance scientific research. Therefore, American government tries various means, such as, research funding, student financial assistance and tax relief, etc. to push private universities to focus on characteristic development. According to USNEWS ranking list in 2010, the top 15 are private universities, what's more, there are 23 private universities in the top 50.

In Germany, the establishment and operation of private universities must meet the requirement of the federal and state government. Both public universities and private universities have same standards. Applicants should be admitted equally, and examination should be done based on relevant regulations. These ensure the high quality of private education. On the whole, the private universities in Germany are small in scale, but have good reputation of high quality.

Taiwan in China paid great attention to the quality guarantee and set up effective quality evaluation system. The quality evaluation of private universities mainly experienced three stages: the first stage (1975-1990) was led by government. The second stage (1990-1997) was practiced by professional academic group. The third stage (1998-present) was conducted by commission. This is very important to supervise and guarantee teaching quality of private universities.

### **6. The Significance and Measures to Establish High-Quality Private Universities**

Establishment of high-quality private universities is a strategic choice to adapt to social development and improve higher education quality. Based on the experience of private higher education in other countries, this essential exploration can promote the sustainable development of private universities. At present, many

programs, such as “985”, “211”, are implemented to promote the development of higher education, which has positive influence on private universities.

In February, 2009, a joint initiative, issued by some private universities, such as Xi’an International University, recommends the government to set up “211” for private universities. This can further promote the implementation of the plan to establish national model private universities and improve the overall quality of private universities. The Outline has proposed the magnificent blueprint for China to become a country full of top talents, at the same, it put forward the basic means to achieve strategic objective. According to the Outline, developing the characteristic, high-quality private universities becomes the urgent task of government and private universities, especially after the issue of the Plan to further Promote the Development of Private Universities, which provided policy support. The five private universities, Beijing City University, Xijing University, Jilin Huaqiao Foreign languages Institute, Hebei Institute of Communications and East university of Heilongjiang, are qualified for graduate enrollment, which arouse the enthusiasm of private universities. The local government in the country provided policy support to develop private universities, such as, in 2011, government in Jiangxi province provided 15,000,000 to support the development of private universities financially, and approved that 4 private universities could carry out the reform to establish characteristic, high-quality private university; the government in Shaanxi arranged special fund of 300,billion to improve the teaching staff and laboratories, etc; the Summit of Establishing High-quality Private Universities held in Chongqing in Dec. 2012 also played an important role to establish high-quality universities.

The key to the success of private universities is the high-quality of university and recognition by society. This requires private universities not only follow the law, but also show its characteristics and advantages. Private universities will strengthen the establishment of modern system and improve internal governing structure; what’s more, they will adhere to scientific talent training model.

The establishment of high-quality universities is a long-term practice, including the following aspects:

**A) Clear Educational Philosophy and Target.**

To update educational idea is very important to establish high-quality universities.

(1) Establish advanced education view. For private universities, establish a non-profit value is important to ensure the non-profit property of private higher education.

(2) Establish scientific development view. The development of scale, structure, quality and speed should be harmonious. As the scale is properly



expanded, adjusting and optimizing structure, improving quality, and maintaining speed are also essential to scientific development.

(3) Establish proper talent and quality view. Society is a complex system. With the development of economy and technology, occupations changes constantly, thus discipline will be adjusted frequently. As a result, the change of talent is necessary. Therefore, it is necessary to reconstruct the talent and quality view.

(4) Establish modern teaching view. The private universities should be based on teachers and students thus students' choice should be respected. Teaching content and methods will be adjusted to teach students better and strengthen students' overall quality.

University's orientation is the key to the development, which is usually reflected in the development goal. The goal should be set on the basis of quality consciousness and fact to avoid unrealistic competition and mode convergence. The development of the goal will show university's educational philosophy and orientation; in addition, considering the university's history and current situation, the goal will match education law and talent development. What's more, the goal should be widely accepted.

#### **B) Scientific Governing Structure and Operating Mechanism.**

The internal governing structure, including decision-making mechanism, internal governing structure and operating mechanism, is the guarantee to accomplish the mission of university. Improving internal governing structure is necessary to establish high-quality universities.

(1) The board system should be improved and principal independent operation should be respected. The intervention of investor in university affairs should be strictly limited.

(2) Supervision system should be improved to ensure information publicity.

(3) Faculty participation in democratic management and supervision should be guaranteed to arouse the enthusiasm and initiative of teachers and students.

(4) The academic authority and administrative authority should be coordinated well with fully respect of academic authority. The function of offices and department will be optimized to improve efficiency.

(5) The relevant regulations should be made to clarify the relationship between university and government, university and society, as well as the internal interest groups.

The system construction should be strengthened to guarantee the establishment of high-quality universities. The normal management and emergency management

will be improved to ensure the safe and stable operation of university. In short, the mechanism of legally operation, independent development and self-restriction will be improved to guarantee non-profit property and efficiency of higher education.

### **C) Advanced Training Mode And Quality Guarantee.**

Talent training mode includes training objective, major and curriculum arrangement, teaching method and means, teaching evaluation and quality control, etc.

(1) Set talent training goal. For most private universities, the goal is to develop applied and skilled talents, and clarify the requirements of talent training from the aspects of knowledge, ability and quality.

(2) Establish scientific professional system. Major is of great importance to talent training, so it should be set scientifically.

(3) Optimize curriculum and teaching content. General education and professional education should be balanced, besides, interdisciplinary education should be valued. At the same time, updating the teaching content is necessary. In addition, we'd better improve students' practical ability by developing students' ability of independent thinking, problem analyzing and solving.

(4) Reform teaching methods and means. Modern information technology, especially network, should be used to explore diverse teaching. We can also learn from foreign experiences to study Inquiry Teaching, such as problem-based learning, discussion, case study, etc.

(5) Strengthen teaching construction. More funds should be put into the construction of curriculum, teaching material, as well as laboratories and social practice base.

In order to establish high-quality universities, we'd better strengthen the awareness of quality control and construction of quality guarantee system. Private universities will focus on talent training and teaching. Based on the common teaching law, private universities will explore to improve talent quality, thus form their own characteristics.

### **D) Excellent Human Resources and Material Resources.**

The stable human and material resources are significant to establish high-quality private universities.

(1) Construction of human resources mainly includes the followings:

- Construction of teaching faculty is crucial to sustainable development of university. The structure of teaching faculty, such as the structure of age, subject, title, education, part-time or full-time, will be adjusted and optimized. Combined with the reality, the construction plan will be implemented to improve the overall

quality of teaching staff. Private universities should pay attention to teachers' life and solve their problems to form good atmosphere.

-Construction of management team is the guarantee to accomplish the development goal. We will try to organize an efficient management team and improve their quality by systematic training to provide better service for teachers and students.

- Construction of material resources mainly includes the followings:

1) set up stable funds guarantee mechanism. The funds should be raised by a variety of channels. Trust system and foundation system will be introduced in certain universities to raise money legally. The standard financial system should be employed to manage funds, at the same time, the efficient use of limited funds and resources are important to the full use of funds.

2) improve the university facilities. Facilities include expansion of scale, infrastructure construction, purchase of books and materials in library, experimental equipment update, logistics service, and information construction in campus, etc.

#### **E) Rich Campus Culture and Excellent Educational Atmosphere.**

Campus culture, the soul of university life, originates from the university's educational philosophy, value and academic quality, and is reflected in universities regulations, behavior and material condition, which influence teachers' and students' thoughts and behavior as well as the development of university. In order to promote campus culture, academic atmosphere and educational atmosphere should be optimized to create an excellent cultural atmosphere.

Construction of campus culture not only means the establishment of culture landscape, the theme sculpture or characteristic pavilion, but also runs through the process of university management and talent development. Based on the soft resources, we will influence students in attitudes, values, and life thus to form free, scientific, open campus culture.

### **7. The Suggestions On The Construction Of High-Quality Private Universities**

#### **A) Take Effective Measures To Implement The Program Of High-Quality Private Universities**

The government should start the program of high-quality private universities timely to promote the development of private universities according to the Outline.

(1) Systematic arrangement. The special funds should be included in central and local education budget to provide financial guarantee for implementing the program of high-quality private universities.

(2) Careful planning. Based on the study of construction standard of high-quality private universities, the plan will be drawn to implement the construction.

(3) Strengthen supervision and information services. Quality standard will be improved and index system and evaluation measures will be worked out to implement quality certification and verification; in addition, due to information management system of private higher education and public service platform, quality construction report and annual development report will be released to provide objective, accurate and comprehensive information for the supervision by government and society. At the same time, this will promote the self discipline and fair competition of private universities.

(4) Provide training services. The training services of organizers, administrators, and key teachers will be strengthened to improve the quality of administrators and teachers.

#### **B) Issue Relevant Documents to Provide Policy Guarantee to the Construction of High-Quality Private Universities**

Private higher education is an important social welfare undertaking, manifesting the vitality of higher education system. Either from international experience or from realistic choice, private higher education has been regarded as the significant part of Chinese higher education, so the development of private higher education should be promoted. According to the Outline, the discriminatory policies should be eliminated to ensure the autonomy of private universities, besides, more support on policy and finance will be provided. Education field and society are highly concerned about Opinions on Further Promote Higher Education. It is hoped that relevant departments and private education sector try best to promote the introduction of the document to optimize the development environment of private education, thus to ensure the construction of private higher education.

#### **C) Establish Communication Platform to Strengthen the Research and Share Achievement.**

To strengthen the communication and cooperation between private universities, public universities, especially between national private universities and international private universities, is essential to establish high-quality private universities. Education sector and higher universities should adopt a variety of means, such as special conference, experience exchange meeting, university president forum, international academic conferences, etc. to improve the quality of management in private universities. When education sector, especially public universities, organize the conferences or international academic forums, the

invitation should also be extended to private universities to promote interactions and exchanges and share experience and achievement. The communication between private universities in our countries and the world should be enhanced to learn from each other.

**D) Improve The Reputation And Social Recognition Based on the Long-Term Accumulation.**

The construction of high-quality private universities is a complicated systematic project with a dynamic process. Sufficient funding, proper plan and good facility condition can be achieved quickly, what's more, correct thinking, careful practice, and reasonable management can be promoted in short term, while the construction of high-quality private universities with skilled teaching faculty and excellent education tradition needs a long-term accumulation. The key to the establishment of high-quality universities is the quality of talents and wide recognition by society. Therefore, in order to establish high-quality private universities, the energy and funding should be put into the development of connotation, the reform of talent training mode and construction of teaching in particular. We believe that some private universities will stand out after long-term hard work.