

Doctoral Educational Governance in Chinese Universities: Evolution, Status Quo and Trends

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1. Evolvement of Doctoral Education Scale in China



1. Development of Doctoral Education Scale in China

Year	Enrollment	Annual Growth Rate	Number of Doctoral Students in School	Number of Graduated Doctoral Students
1978	18			
1982	900		536	6
1985	3000		3639	
1993	6200		17570	
1995	11056	22.33%	28752	
2000	25142	26.25%	67293	11004
2005	54794	2.83%	191317	27677
2010	63762	2.99%	258950	48987
2015	74416	2.45%	326687	53778
2018	95500	8.3%	389500	60700

1. Development of Doctoral Education Scale in China

- In 1978, the starting year of doctoral education for New China, only 18 doctoral students were enrolled.
- 1985-2003: over 20% of the average annual growth rate of enrollment ; after 2004: 3% to 4%.
- From 1978 to 2018, the number of enrolled doctoral students saw a sharp increase, from 18 to 95,500, accumulatively totaling 1.23 million.
- On June 16, 1982, 6 people were conferred doctoral degrees (the 1st batch in New China). In 1999, that number increased to more than 10 thousand for the first time.
- As of 2017, there were 401 doctoral degrees-conferring institutions, 2,932 authorized doctoral degrees-conferring units in the first-level discipline and 534 ones in the secondary level discipline, as well as 135 professional ones.



2. Evolvment of Doctoral Educational Governance in Chinese Universities

2.1 Phase 1 (1978-1993): Government-dominated Phase

- In 1981, 3 documents were published, including *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Academic Degrees*, etc, **which marked the establishment of China's academic degree system.**
- In 1982, the Ministry of Education (MOE) issued *Interim Provisions on the Admission of Postgraduates for Doctoral Degree*. In 1984, others were issued, such as *Opinions on the Training of Doctoral Students*, which contained regulations on doctoral students education. **The publication of the aforementioned 3 documents has marked the initial formation of the cultivation system for doctoral education and the doctoral degree conferring system in China.**
- According to *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Academic Degrees*, the evaluation of doctoral degrees shall be jointly performed by the defense committee and the evaluation committee, **and the list of committee members shall be submitted by the degrees-conferring units to relevant competent departments for approval, and the list shall also be reported to the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council for filing.**

2.1 Phase 1 (1978-1993): Government-dominated Phase

- In 1987, the former State Education Commission was responsible for guiding the quality evaluation system of the conferring of doctoral degrees which was still in its infancy.
- From 1990 to 1998, the discipline ranking assessment with administrative features aimed to realize **the spirit of selecting and supporting the best**, making it more competitive among colleges and universities .
- The first two batches of doctoral supervisors from 1981 had to be approved by the State. Since April 1986, it was necessary for the listed doctoral supervisors to be approved by the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council took full charge.
- In March 1993, the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council officially approved the first 13 pilot colleges and universities to independently review the added list of doctoral supervisors.
- In December 1993, a list of 1,509 doctoral supervisors were reviewed and approved at the 12th meeting **of the Academic Degrees Committee** of the State Council. In addition, a pilot unit gained the right of **self-examination of an added list of 670 doctoral supervisors**.

2.1 Phase 1 (1978-1993): Government-dominated Phase

- Experts participated in the review and evaluation of proposed authorized doctoral degrees-conferring units and degree programs
- In terms of the testing mechanism of doctoral students, the recruiting units enjoyed a certain level of autonomy from the beginning.
- In December 1992, the State Education Commission and the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council jointly issued *Several Opinions on the Reform and Development of Degrees and Graduate Education* which made requirements at different levels. For national governments, they should transform functions, strengthen macro-management and improve guidance for policy making. All provinces and cities should plan regional reforms and development of graduate education. As to the units for the training of graduates, the autonomy in running a university should be exercised within the authority of national policies.

2.1 Phase 1 (1978-1993): Government-dominated Phase

- Doctoral educational governance is characterized by the following aspects:
- First, national planning. The central government was responsible for approving and distributing the basic requirements for the review and evaluation of degrees-conferring units, enrollment quota and doctoral supervisors, reflecting a high degree of planning and centralization.
- Second, national administrative review directly served degrees-conferring authorization. Any master's or doctoral degrees-conferring units could be authorized to enroll graduates only when assessed and approved by the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council. The examination of degrees-conferring units directly served their authorization, which was a typical act of national governments with strong features of administrative assessment.

2.2 Phase 2 (1994-2004): Exploration Phase

- In 1995, the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council issued *Notice on the Discipline Ranking of Degree and graduate education and Reviewing Pilot Unit by Exercising the Right of Doctoral Degrees-Conferring Authorization According to the First-level Discipline*, entrusting evaluation institutions to make an overall assessment of the five main first-level disciplines like mathematics, chemistry, etc. The improvement requirements would be made for unqualified ones.
- On January 28, 1997, the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council intended to make a large-scale assessment of the previous authorized degrees-conferring units by the preliminary examination from experts, communication evaluation from peer experts and reexamination given by a group of experts.
- On September 23, 1997, the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council released the results. **77 doctoral degrees-conferring units failed the examination, accounting for 4.5% of all assessed units.** Four types of requirements were proposed accordingly: improvement, suspension of enrollment or authorization, suspension of enrollment and authorization, revoking authorization.

2.2 Phase 2 (1994-2004): Exploration Phase

- In 1994, Discipline Ranking Institute for Degree and Graduate Education of Institutions of Higher Learning and Scientific Research , **China's first institutional organization** for degrees and graduate education and evaluation **was formally established, which marked the professionalization of Chinese graduate qualification evaluation.**
- In November 1998, the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council and the MOE decided to establish the **China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center**. Later in 2003, the Center was renamed as Ministry of Education Degree and Graduate Education Development Center.
- In 1999, the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council **delegated to the doctoral degrees-conferring units the full power to determine doctoral supervisors**. Meanwhile, it was required that candidates for doctoral supervisors who was born after January 1 of 1953 should receive a doctor's degree.
- **Expand the enrollment autonomy for recruit units.** Since 1997, the reformed measures for the administration of doctoral enrollment plan have required that the number of doctoral graduates enrolled by the state should include not only the number of students enrolled in the national program, but also the number of ones in the entrusted training and self-financing enrollment program.

2.2 Phase 2 (1994-2004): Exploration Phase

- **Doctoral educational governance in the second period is characterized by the following aspects:**
- (1) The premise of the doctoral degrees-conferring units authorization access was originally driven by administrative review and now changed to the national centralized academic review-orientation.
- (2) There were no restrictions with regard to the number of qualified doctoral degrees-conferring units which could also enjoy life-long authorization.
- (3) The third-party evaluation and external quality assurance only played a secondary role with limited impact. Colleges and universities did not form an effective self-assessment system and internal quality assessment guarantee system.
- (4) The increase in doctoral education autonomy was mainly reflected in the admissions process and the determination of doctoral supervisors, but the enrollment scale was still strictly dominated by the government.

2.3 Phase 3 (2005-2014): Phase of Reform with multiple Participants

- In 2005, the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council intended to conduct regular assessment of doctor's and master's degrees-conferring units that had been authorized since over six years ago. **This was the first time for China to have conducted regular assessment of doctoral degrees-conferring units.**
- In 2005, **Office of the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council entrusted the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center** to assess the **577** degree programs including 84 doctoral degrees in the first-level discipline and 493 ones in the second level, as well as **randomly checking dissertations**. Results were divided into three groups: qualified, rectified within a fixed period of time and unqualified. In the first round of assessment this year (2005), three doctoral degrees-conferring units were revoked authorization compared to 22 ones that were required to make rectifications within a prescribed time limit.
- **Degree assessments started in 2005 ended the life-long degrees-conferring authorization system** . Colleges and universities have also officially launched degree assessments to constrain and motivate the development of degrees-conferring units.

2.3 Phase 3 (2005-2014): Phase of Reform with multiple Participants

- **Further increase the autonomy granted to colleges and universities.** In the 11th authorization review in 2011, the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council only reviewed the degrees-conferring authorization for first-level disciplines while that for the second level was determined by the authorized units themselves.
- **Start to strengthen the internal guarantee mechanism for establishing doctoral education in colleges and universities.** In 2014, the MOE required that the construction of quality guarantee system for graduate education should be promoted, and universities should conduct diagnostic self-assessments. For the assessment of degrees-conferring authorization units, self-assessment was mainly conducted in the first five years, while the educational administrative institutions implemented the qualification assessment in the last year.
- In 2010, the enrollment mode was adjusted to three types: general entrance examination, master-doctor degree continuous studies and doctor degree-targeted studies. In 2014, the age limits for applying for doctoral studies were completely cancelled.

2.3 Phase 3 (2005-2014): Phase of Reform with multiple Participants

- Characteristics:
- (1) According to the needs for social and economic development, the authorization scale of doctoral students was adjusted.
- (2) The degrees-conferring authorization would be granted only after passing the assessment, while those disciplines assessed as unqualified would be revoked authorization. This was the first time that China had abolished the degrees-conferring authorization life-long tenure in terms of systems.
- (3) In essence, the discipline ranking system was still dominated by administrative power.
- (4) Third-party social organizations were not independent enough.

2.4 Phase 4 (2014-today): Deepened-reform Phase of Multiple Participants

- In 2014, the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council and the MOE launched a special assessment nationwide for additional degrees-conferring units that had been authorized for three years and a qualification assessment for degrees-conferring units that had been authorized for six years. It indicates that China had established a new framework for systematic and standard qualification assessment of authorized degree-conferring units.
- In 2016, the Academic Degrees Commission of the State Council pointed out **four unqualified doctoral degrees-conferring units** and **five were required to make rectifications** within a prescribed time limit.
- The main features are as follows: (1) Allow degree-conferring units to make independent and dynamic adjustments or to apply for cancellation, increasing their autonomy to run a university. (2) The evaluator changes from government-led in the past to the degree-conferring units today, and each unit has also transformed from passive acceptance of evaluation in the past to active internal evaluation today.

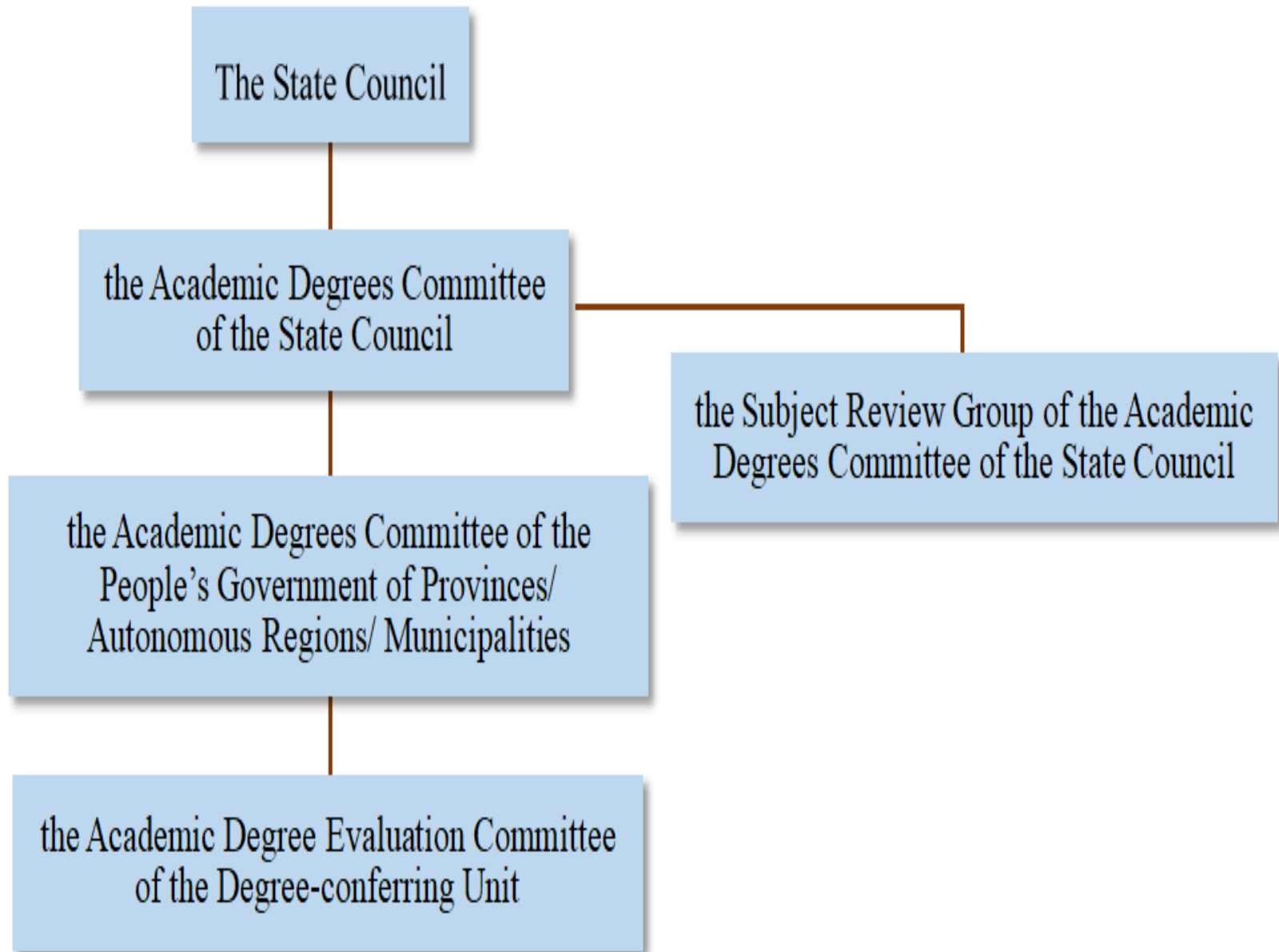
2.4 Phase 4 (2014-today): Deepened-reform Phase of Multiple Participants

- **The government plays the role of a leader and a supervisor.** Through direct administration and regulation, the government stipulates such aspects as the enrollment scale, enrollment methods, requirements for application and examination subjects and controls the enrollment of doctoral students, gradually considering the laws of market development.
- **Universities make autonomous decisions during the whole recruitment process of doctoral students.**
- **Doctoral supervisors possess greater power in the enrollment.**
- **Candidates have more autonomous choices.** There are four ways to be doctoral students in China: general entrance examination, master-doctor degree continuous studies, doctor degree-targeted studies and the “application-assessment” system.

A photograph of a modern university building with a unique, stepped architectural design, featuring multiple rectangular volumes of varying heights. The building is constructed from light-colored bricks or concrete. It is situated behind a body of water, which perfectly reflects the building's form. The sky is a clear, pale blue. In the foreground, the water's surface is calm with subtle ripples. To the left, some greenery and a small bridge are visible. To the right, another part of the university campus is partially visible.

3. Status Quo and Problems in Doctoral Educational Governance in Chinese Universities

3.1 Three-level Management System of Doctoral Education



China's degree and graduate education adopts a three-level management system--the central government, provincial-level governments and the degrees-conferring units.

With the deepening of graduate education system reform, the responsible units of degree and graduate education management has gradually shifted to local governments and degrees-conferring units.

3.1 Three-level Management System of Doctoral Education

- The Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council guide the conferring of degrees nationally.
- The provincial degrees committee takes a holistic approach to deal with regional issues related to degrees in light of local realities. The committee will verify the qualifications and materials of applicants, among which the qualified universities will be appraised. Then a meeting will be held to determine whether new doctoral degrees-conferring units will be added.
- The university degrees evaluation committee is the degree management institution of a degrees-conferring unit. The committee can be assisted by a few sub-committees which are set up according to the discipline categories of degrees. If degrees-conferring units conduct material fraud, violate the rules of review and influence review results, their qualifications will be cancelled through one-vote veto.

3.2 Responsibilities and Power of Doctoral Supervisors

- Application for graduate degrees must be approved by supervisors.
- Under the premise that the stage achievements of applicants meet the relevant requirements, supervisors can decide within a certain limit the appraisal method for applicants.
- For dissertations that encounter disagreements, supervisors should give opinions and suggestions which can be implemented after approval by the academic degrees evaluation sub-committee of the school.

3.3 The Role of the Third Party' s Participation in Governance

- - Educational administration departments enjoy a rich administrative resources and power, leading the reform direction of doctoral educational governance as a primary action group.
- - Higher education institutions participate in and support the reform of doctoral educational governance by recognizing or advocating government reform policies.
- - Experts and scholars influence the reform of doctoral education through professional knowledge.

3.4 Role of International Joint Training of Doctoral Students

- China Scholarship Council (CSC) started the National Construction of High-level University Public Graduate Project in 2006. Doctoral students conduct scientific research under the joint guidance of Chinese and foreign supervisors. The duration is 6-24 months.
- Since 2007, sponsored by CSC, many doctoral students have been sent in succession to foreign top universities or scientific research institutions to study and do scientific research. Jointly training doctoral students internationally has become a significant training mode in Chinese higher education institutions.
- The project boasts several merits:
 - (1) It well reflects the capabilities of domestic higher education institutions to achieve the internalization of education.
 - (2) Domestic colleges and universities are able to absorb advanced teaching philosophy and improve their own international influence and the quality of domestic doctoral students.

3.5 Role of University-Enterprise Joint Training, or University-Institute Joint Training

- In 2010, MOE of the People's Republic of China launched the pilot projects of training doctoral students jointly by universities and enterprises, or by universities and scientific research institutions.
- In the first project, a graduate student is jointly guided by two supervisors both from universities and enterprises. Therefore, it can be assured that the jointly-trained students will complete their research and dissertations with high quality.
- As for the second project, joint training has initially displayed a certain scale effect since its starting in 2010. In 2015, the planned number of students to enroll was 706, increasing by 9.8 times compared to 72 in 2010, the first time to conduct the project. As of 2015, the project had covered 41 universities and colleges, 47 engineering research institutions, amounting to 114 jointly training programs.

3.6 Role of University Participation in Governance

- At the beginning of 2013, the nation started the comprehensive reform of graduate education and stressed that the main role of quality assurance in training units.
- Many colleges and universities gradually implemented the quality guarantee mechanism of internal management. The combination of internal quality management and external quality supervision improves the quality of doctoral students.
- Colleges and departments and institutes of colleges are responsible for organizing expert review. The two-level quality monitoring system of colleges and departments were established and begun to play a role.
- The philosophy of doctoral education in colleges and universities has transformed from quantitative expansion to quality improvement, and an anonymous review of doctoral dissertations begun to be carried out.
- Since 2013, some colleges and universities had taken the initiative to entrusted the third party- the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center to anonymously review all the doctoral dissertations.

3.7 Internal and External Quality Assurance Mechanisms

promoting each other

the External Quality Supervision System (the third party)

the Internal Quality Management Assurance System (the main part)

- National doctoral dissertation sampling system
- Effort made by the Ministry of Education to tackle the academic misconduct
- Disclosure of postgraduate quality report Information
- Supervision by industry sectors and social organizations
- Sampling experts database set up by the academic degree center

- Regulations on doctoral dissertation sampling of universities
- Doctor's mid-term examination and double blind review
- Revision of doctor's publication of papers
- Support of universities for the *Distinguished Doctor Cultivation Program*
- Awards of excellent doctoral dissertation at the provincial
- Internationalization of doctoral education
- Enrollment qualification for doctoral supervisor

3.8 Existing problems

- Colleges and universities' autonomy are limited by the degrees-conferring legislation and the management system at the central and local levels.
- In the reform of national degree systems, the guarantee of the quality of doctoral degrees and the market mechanism of moderate introduction are not good enough. Attention should be paid to the participation of diversified social bodies, and to relying on market mechanism to improve the talents training in colleges and universities so as to achieve the survival of the fittest.
- Students and teachers are rarely given fully play.

The background image shows the Geological Museum of China University of Geosciences. It is a large, circular building with a prominent glass dome and a stone facade. The name '中國地質大學' (China University of Geosciences) is inscribed on the building. A circular emblem is visible above the entrance. The building is reflected in a pool of water in the foreground. A blue semi-transparent banner is overlaid on the image, containing the title text in yellow.

4. Trend of Doctoral Educational Governance Reform in Chinese Universities

- (1) **The government still holds strong power with regard to the Procedural Regulation on doctoral education.** Both the doctoral majors and scale are still subject to administrative approval by the government.
- (2) **The reform of streamlining administration, delegating power and improving regulation and optimizing services in higher education has become the new trend in doctoral educational governance, which changes from approval governance to regulative governance.** The government conducts certification, evaluation and accountability for authorized doctoral degrees-conferring units, training processes, dissertations, and supervisors in the form of quality supervision.
- (3) **Universities have increasingly strengthened their cooperation in doctoral education with third parties** (such as third-party evaluation agencies), enterprises and public institutions, and foreign universities to improve the quality of doctoral training.

- (4) The role of third-party social organizations is increasingly prominent in such issues related to degree management as the review of doctoral degrees-conferring authorization, supervision and examination of degrees conferring, suspension and cancellation of degrees qualification.
- (5) The role of colleges and authorized doctoral degrees-conferring units in academic management is increasingly important.
- (6) Highlight the role of supervisors in cultivating students and provide personalized training for each doctoral student.

- (7) The role of doctoral students in the management of doctoral education will be more and more important.
- (8) The multi-subject participation of domestic and foreign universities, enterprises, scientific research institutions, etc., and the mechanism of cooperation in training doctoral students are constantly improved.

Thank you !

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