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The Value, Challenges, and Practices of University Internal Governance Reform

—— Based on the Study and outcomes of the LEAD2 Advanced Seminar and
Workshops of EU-China University Governance and Innovation in 2019

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Abstract

From June 23-28, 2019, the “Advanced Seminar and Workshop series on EU-China University Governance and Innovations” were held at the National Academy of Education Administration, Beijing. The seminar and workshops were mainly divided into three activity forms: "scholar keynote speeches", "on-site lectures" and "workshop series". Topics such as the governance model and structures of Chinese and European universities, the key issues in governance, and university-level governance were shared and discussed during the seminars. The participants also had the opportunity to visit four top-level universities in China to attend on-site lectures. This paper summarizes the relevant content of the seminars, and on this basis further, presents an analysis of the relevant issues regarding university internal governance at the faculty levels.

Keywords: LEAD2 project, EU-China university, internal governance at the faculty level

Under the new situation of the governance reform of Chinese and European universities, the governance at the faculty levels within universities is also facing great challenges. Optimizing the internal governance structures at the faculty levels is a core issue of building a governance system for internal governance in modern universities with Chinese characteristics. Based on the success of the first phase of the LEAD project and on the current research and study of academic leadership, the LEAD2 Advanced Seminar and Workshops of EU-China University Governance and Innovations in China and Europe, supported by “Erasmus+” LEAD2 project, was held at the National Academy of Educational Administration. The aim of the event was to strengthen the cooperation and learning in the governance structures among Chinese and European universities, the internal governance at faculty levels, especially the relationship between the university level and the faculty level governance at universities. This project adopted blended training (both online and face-to-face workshops).

I. Background and value of internal governance reform at the faculty levels

In 2017, the Ministry of Education of China promulgated the “*Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Higher Education in the Field of Decentralization and Optimizing Service Reform*”, it points out the reform of internal governance of universities, and the fundamentals of reform must be implemented at the faculty levels, from which the faculties (in China it is often referred to as the second level colleges) gradually gained independent governance. Under the pressure of academic innovation and resource competition, the universities decentralize the internal power, which adapts to the main direction of China’s higher education reform, and mobilizes the enthusiasm of the development of universities.

In essence, the reform of the two-level management and operation at faculties (second-level colleges) and universities is to transform the original management model

from taking functional departments as the main management mode to taking the faculties (second-level colleges) as the main body. [1] Its overall goal is to achieve a downward shift in power, to make the university level responsible for overall and macroscopic work, and to support the advantages and characteristics of the faculties (second-level colleges). At the level of each faculty (second-level college), it has a restrictive effect on the university as a whole, which affects the overall quality and comprehensive benefits of the university. From the perspective of the management of academic talents in the faculties and universities, academics are the core driving power. The management of faculties (second-level colleges) and universities should ensure academic freedom, and the trend of academic development finally focuses on colleges, especially on first-class scholars, the internal management of faculties (second-level colleges) and universities should focus on the faculties (second-level colleges) , from the “university-run and faculty-level (second-level colleges) governance” to the “faculty-run and faculty-level governance”, and then to the “scholars-run and faculty-level governance.”

On the one hand, improving the internal governance structure can break through the excessive concentration of management authority formed in the long-term management of Chinese universities, over-management of functional departments, giving the university management more power, and forming a self-management operation mechanism under the leadership of the university in order to improve the overall university level and comprehensive strength of the university. On the other hand, by providing more autonomy within the faculties (second-level colleges), more communication and learning between professors and students, communication and cooperation between different faculties is more conducive to the advantages of different clusters of faculties, which will form the academic advantages of each faculty to adapt to the trend of scientific development and promote the modernization and integration of discipline development to ensure the improvement of teaching and research performance.

II. Challenges and difficulties faced at the faculty levels

Although many made universities have achievements at the two-level management of faculties and universities, there is still a long way to achieve real reasonable and efficient management. The members of the LEAD2 workshops analyzed and summarized the common problems and general issues in the internal governance structure of the current two-level governance, and proposed that the internal governance reform of the university is still facing many challenges and difficulties.

(1) Coordination management: academic rights and administrative rights are difficult to balance

There are two basic modes of power within the governance of faculties, namely academic power and administrative power. The two rights models of their power are the general consensus of faculty-level governance. These two basic rights models are directly related to the operation mode and management effect of faculty-level governance. The unique management structure, which has both the nature of the discipline and the nature of the bureaucracy, has also spurred the complex intertwining of the management of academic affairs and administrative affairs.

For a long time, the academic power and administrative power within the university have not found a reasonable balance. How to deal with the relationship between these two modes of power is not only an important issue for top management but also for faculty-level governance, which is also a difficulty that must be faced by the two-level governance. Professor Yasar Kondakci from Middle East Technical University pointed out that middle-level academic leaders play a vital role in filling the gap in academic leadership. The deans played a subtle but critical role in the decision-making of faculty-level governance, and they linked central management to the academic sector. For the middle-level leaders of the universities (in this case, the deans), there are many conflictions between the administrative identity and the research scholars. They have the legal power, but within the scope of their capabilities, this direct power is difficult to exercise and cannot violate the academic values between peers.

The dean must deal with the relationship with the senior leaders of the university, fulfill the orders and tasks of the uploading, and coordinating the cooperation and communication with the same leadership and colleagues; more attention should be paid to the educational activities involving students and professors. Therefore, scientific and reasonable academic and administrative power cooperation is an inevitable requirement for the implementation of two-level governance in colleges and universities.

(2) System design: the boundaries between the two-level governance in the universities are unclear

In the two-level governance of universities, although there are corresponding regulations on two-level responsibilities, still different levels of power chaos appears in practice, and with the increase of power and workload at the faculty level, corresponding changes have also taken place during the implementation at the faculties. However, the powers and responsibilities of the two levels within the university are unclear, which will lead to poor coordination between the universities, the university leaders, and the functional departments, resulting in inefficient work and management, for example, some things are in control by both parties, some things are pushed away by each other, and the resources in universities cannot be reasonably configured so that the existing educational resources are not properly used.

Professor Jan Cornelis, former vice-rector at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, proposed that in the pursuit of new reforms in the governance of faculties, it is necessary to clarify the governance structure and governance system of the universities from both horizontal and vertical perspectives, to clarify the relationship between the functional departments and the faculty's responsibility of governance, to distinguish the rights and responsibilities between the faculties and combine the policies, colleges and experts to match the rights of education and research governance. In addition, the leader not only needs management ability but also needs a management vision for the future. The role of faculty leaders (deans) needs to adapt and adjust as soon as possible. It is necessary to implement the university policy in terms of administrative ability and to combine reality with academic-building. The faculty leaders need to pay attention to the overall interests of the faculty and also to pursue the interests of the university. Based on the

actual situation of the faculty, the rules and regulations within the faculties will be improved and a clear management system will be formulated.

(3) Team building: The interests between academic teams are difficult to coordinate

Academic teams in universities generally refer to the formation of formal groups through mutual collaboration in the study of major theoretical and practical issues due to common academic goals, generally divided into teaching teams and research teams. Through the internal cooperation and coordination, the academic teams are not only conducive to expanding the breadth and depth of research problems, but also beneficial to producing good teaching effects and research atmosphere. However, in the cooperation, the team members are prone to temporarily set up the team but do not set a clear target, resulting in the inability to achieve balanced and complementary interests, and it is difficult for the academic leaders to assign tasks to the core group. The reason for this phenomenon is the mutual interest restriction and distribution between different disciplines, which made the participants utilitarian and the coordination stability of the group is poor. Secondly, the academic achievements are often used in the evaluation of scientific research results, which mostly belong to the first author or responsible person of the thesis or subject. Furthermore, the effectiveness of other members is not properly reflected and reducing the motivation of other members. Thirdly, the relevant management for academic teams and resource optimization within the universities are not perfect. The development of teaching and research is subject to administrative management to a certain extent. [3]

In order to encourage academic innovation, the cooperation of teams should be reformed. Universities should first reform the examination and approval methods of the project, further allocate the scientific research tasks and achievements, rationally distribute the rewards, and stimulate the enthusiasm of team members to participate actively and consciously. Secondly, it is necessary to improve the personnel management system of the academic team, encourage academic leaders to form academic teams, and implement the necessary administrative supervision and give the

team a certain service guarantee. Finally, the university administrators need to play their own role and guide and establish a sense of mutual cooperation and mutual service, and create an academic environment and academic atmosphere of democracy and freedom, and respect for individuality.

III. The main path of seeking breakthroughs in faculty-level internal university governance

As the grassroots unit of universities, the faculty (second-level college) is a key part of the university-level governance and the universities are directly connected with the society through the second-level college level. In terms of cultivating talents and discipline construction, grassroots colleges must have more decision-making power in order to make choices that are conducive to discipline construction and professional development. In this seminar, through the on-site lectures of the governance of the four second-level colleges of China's top universities, we conclude that the common characteristics of the effective governance of the second-level colleges and their main paths are as follows:

3.1 Cultivation of philosophy (ideas): Clear positioning, Student-Centered

In the process of talent cultivation in universities, the first priority for university-level governance is to clarify the orientation of the faculty. From the perspective of the training objectives of several universities, the faculties create and follow their own values in the context of the university environment and their own professions, and can accurately position the conditions, resources, and prospects of development, thus promoting talent cultivation.

Zhang Xinghui, secretary of Tianjin Sino-German University of Applied Sciences, proposed that the second-level colleges of the university should cultivate more practical, technical and skilled talents for regional economic and social development.

Hu Baijing, dean of the Faculty of Journalism at the Renmin University of China, proposed an “ecological training system” based on the nature of the department. On the basis of professional integration, discipline integration, and cross-cultural integration,

students are taught in accordance with their aptitude.

According to the faculty's situation, Ma Xingbin, the dean of Tianjin University, put forward the concept of “leading change and shaping the future”, designing a talent training system for the future, cultivating engineering leading talents with professional knowledge and multiple abilities, and pointing out that “Student-Centered” approach should be implemented. The idea focuses on the growth and success of students, focusing on differentiation and personalization.

In the process of cultivating, the deans emphasized that students should be the core, and the difference among students be respected and “personalized training” be implemented. At the same time, they should focus on cultivating students' questioning spirit, strengthening students' innovative ability and forming an open, free and inclusive style of study.

Professor Yan Fengqiao, dean of the Faculty of Education at Peking University, pointed out that since President Cai Yuanpei proposed the concept of "compatibility and harmony", their students still have the qualities of free exploration. The Faculty of Journalism and Communication at the Renmin University of China has also created certain conditions for the freedom of students. For example, a large number of elective courses have been implemented to give students more freedom to choose courses. Teachers will adjust and optimize the content of the course to meet the needs of the students in the course. Because students are free, students can think and act more independently.

3.2 Discipline Construction: Thinking of Integrating Majors and Disciplines

Interdisciplinary and intercultural thinking is the inherent need to promote knowledge reproduction in the context of current professional classification. Dean Ma Xingbin proposed to strengthen "through and integration", focusing on the commonality of disciplines and the design of undergraduate and postgraduate training systems. Tianjin Sino-German University of Applied Sciences is also setting up an interdisciplinary and interdisciplinary “smart manufacturing institute” to adapt to regional economic development and Chinese manufacturing 2025. For the traditional disciplines, under the impact of the new era and new professions, Dean Prof. Hu Baijing gave the answer on

how to maintain the traditional professional fortress and maintain the subjectivity and effectiveness of the discipline. He believed that the most important point is to achieve the breakthrough of the inherent curriculum and knowledge logic, transcend the existing boundaries of thinking, symbiosis with other disciplines and cultures, open the boundaries of knowledge, focus on the commonality of disciplines, and seek the unique value of disciplines.

In the curriculum reform, the faculty (second-level college) not only needs to build the basic undergraduate core curriculum system but also according to the different periods of the college development, according to the different needs of students to reform and update the curriculum system. On the basis of strengthening the basic course study, it is also necessary to integrate the profession and the discipline to eliminate the boundary barrier and achieve multi-disciplinary cultural symbiosis. In the integration of disciplines, what cannot be ignored is the reconstruction of the knowledge system. It requires all the different disciplines and professional curriculum knowledge, integrated into a knowledge platform, guided by knowledge projects, build a database and case library, transforms the curriculum according to the knowledge system and logic, and reconstruct the knowledge map. In order to achieve discipline integration and professional integration, it is necessary to have sufficient tolerance and open communication between the leaders of different professions, to adjust and optimize the knowledge modules of both parties, to achieve joint preparation of lessons, and to rationally distribute credits and establish a training program.

3.3 International development: cross-cultural communication and collision

The development of disciplines cannot be confined to the domestic market. It requires international cultural dialogue and academic exchanges. It is not only an internal requirement for professional development but also a powerful weapon for enhancing the competitiveness of universities.

On the one hand, the faculty (second-level college) must have a broad international perspective, fully tap international resources, cooperate with foreign universities, realize the internationalization of disciplines, and create an “international training platform” for students. The leaders of the above-mentioned faculties mentioned that the

faculty provides and meets the needs of most students to study abroad when conditions permit. During the undergraduate period, students have a large number of opportunities to participate in international research projects, international conferences, international competitions, international visits. In addition, through a variety of cooperation models, the faculties cooperate with a number of high-level universities in foreign countries. Broaden the horizons of students through short-term exchanges or through exchanges and joint training with world-renowned schools. Most undergraduate graduates also go abroad to pursue postgraduate studies. From the outside, colleges have also established a “study abroad program” to serve the “Belt and Road” construction and recruit international students from many countries.

On the other hand, to build a first-class professional in accordance with certain international standards, and to be in line with international standards in discipline construction, the faculty-level governance of Tianjin Sino-German Applied Technology University proposed that in the process of realizing the international professional construction, the university independently developed 7 international professional standards and participated in and completed two and achieved the internationalization of goals, standards, teachers, courses, environment, teaching, etc. In order to build a chemical and chemical specialty with international competitive advantages, Tianjin Institute of Chemical Technology has also done a good job in comparison with international standards, step by step to meet international requirements, and in the process, it has also clarified the advantages and shortcomings of the faculty itself and promoted and improved.

3.4 Social adaptation: forming its own characteristics in combination with social needs
The development of the faculty requires its own efforts and social and industry needs. Only by combining teaching with industry, integrating China's actual situation, forming its own characteristics, building a cultural system and experimental base, and then better cultivating students' cultural self-confidence. The Faculty of Journalism of the Renmin University of China proposed to build a disciplinary system, academic system and discourse system with Chinese characteristics based on the core knowledge, theory and method system of news dissemination with Chinese characteristics. [4] The Faculty

of Chemical Engineering and Technology of Tianjin University also proposed that teachers also incorporate the characteristics of the faculty into the teaching. A lot of the experimental equipment of the faculty is designed by the teachers themselves. In scientific research, combined with the needs of regional economic development. Tianjin Sino-German University of Applied Sciences has chosen the university-enterprise collaborative education to serve the needs of regional industrial development and enterprise transformation and upgrading. In addition, several faculties have established corresponding experimental training bases. For example, the Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology of Tianjin University has established a “green chemical and chemical engineering innovation and intelligence base”, a national international science and technology cooperation base, etc. The Faculty of Journalism and Communication at the Renmin University of China has established an industry-university-research platform for think tank bases and multiple laboratories to build an open social service system. A College of Sino-German University of Applied Sciences has built an experimental training system, built a “double-creation platform” to achieve special characteristics, to promote the construction of first-class disciplines, and to promote the cultivation of innovative and applied talents.

IV. Conclusion

There is no unified faculty (second-level college) level governance model in the world, and there is no best governance model. In the current governance, many faculties (second-level colleges) have established their goals by clarifying the objectives of the faculty, integrating the training of professional skills and scientific knowledge in the disciplines, promoting the internationalization of education, and forming their own characteristics to seek ways to improve their governance. However, faculties and colleges also face difficulties of how to balance academic and administrative powers, how to deal with the unclear boundaries of the two-level governance at universities, and how to coordinate the interests of academic teams. In order to better promote the reform of the university-level governance, the faculties and colleges need to further

break through the traditional governance concepts, standardize the governance structures, and provide a more suitable management model for talent training, teacher development, discipline construction, and academic innovation.

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