

Cultural Consciousness : An Important Symbol of World-class Universities with Chinese Characteristics

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Abstract: Building a world-class university with Chinese characteristics is the goal vision and action mission of the construction of “double first-class” in the new era. The rational and conscious cultural choice is the strategic key for Chinese universities to highlight “Chinese characteristics” and lead “world first-class”. However, due to the worldwide invasion of western culture, China's university construction has encountered practical difficulties such as obvious cultural dependence under the habit of takingism, rampant cultural hegemony in the capital operation environment, and difficult cultural construction in the game between China and the West. Based on the construction of “double first-class” in the new era, it is necessary to establish self-confidence in action in the cultural choices of reference and transcendence, lead social development in the cultural cultivation of criticism and reflection, and highlight Chinese characteristics in the cultural governance of integrity and innovation.

Keywords: Chinese Characteristics; World-class Universities; Cultural Consciousness; "Double first-class" Construction.

1. Introduction

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out in the report of the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China that cultural confidence is a more basic, deeper and lasting force in the development of a country and a nation. Regardless of road self-confidence, theoretical self-confidence and institutional self-confidence, its essence is cultural self-confidence based on the five thousand years of civilization inheritance in China. In December 2021, the “resolution” of the Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China re-emphasized the building of a socialist ideology with strong cohesion and leadership, the building of a socialist cultural power and the consolidation of the ideological foundation for the united struggle of the Party, the State and the people. Based on the new stage of development, the implementation of the new development concept and the service of the new development pattern, our higher education still needs to strive to adapt to the status, responsibility and influence of China, which is forming a world power, and accurately serve the strategic overall situation of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. For the construction of China’s “double first-class” in the new era, it is necessary to explore how to get rid of the dependence on Western modern universities on the basis of the fundamental long-term problems of society and culture, and realize the independent, innovative and leading development from the quantitative comparison of technology to the connotation.

2. The Value Implication of Establishing the Cultural Consciousness of World-class Universities with Chinese Characteristics

World-class universities are a policy concept derived from China. From “211 Project” and “985 Project” to “Double First-Class” construction, our government has issued a series of higher education development policies to expand the world influence of China’s top universities. In January 2022, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance and the Development and Reform Commission jointly issued “some opinions on deepening the construction of world-class

universities and first-class disciplines”. Facing the overall situation of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the major changes in the world in the past 100 years, this paper reinterprets the strategic significance of the construction of “double first-class” to accelerate the modernization of education.

However, where does “first class” come from ? What is the fundamental scale ? Looking back on history, the German model centered on Berlin University initiated the postgraduate education and doctoral degree system, led by scientific research, and established the modern university system in the world. On the basis of learning from the British liberal arts tradition and updating the university functions, modern American universities have continued to rise and formed the world-class university system today. From ancient times to today, world-class universities are undoubtedly those universities that define “universities” and those that shape the new pattern of world universities[1]. On the basis of common ideas, they continue to establish their own unique development model, nurture the deepest cultural roots of a country, and play an important role in the historical iteration of the nation's material, spiritual and institutional.

Nowdays, the world has gone through great changes that have not occurred in a hundred years. The western turmoil, such as Britain's Brexit, France's Huangmajia Movement and the Russian-Ukrainian War, has frequently taken place. Social Darwinism, national centralism and populism have been rampant, and the consensus on human values in the post-cold war era has been crazy torn. As a rising world power, how to review the opportunities and challenges of today's world from a global perspective, and how to grasp China's attitude and methods from a national position are undoubtedly the inevitable thinking in the construction of world-class universities with Chinese characteristics.

3. The Practical Dilemma of Establishing the Cultural Consciousness of World-class Universities with Chinese Characteristics

Due to the worldwide invasion of Western culture, the construction of world-class universities in China is facing severe difficulties.

3.1 Cultural Dependence under the Logic of Claimism

As we known, universities in the real sense originated in medieval Europe, and then spread to all countries in the world through several historical changes in the British model, the German model and the American model. Since the industrial revolution, the Western developed countries that first realized industrialization have been tossing around with political, economic and technological advantages, and have seized the vast Far East by colonial means. Regardless of the active reasons for saving the nation from extinction, or the passive results of cultural aggression, a large number of modern Chinese universities such as Yanjing University, St.John's University and Sinian University have sprung up. However, this new study is actually an imported product of Western education and an entity symbol of the involvement of capitalist colonial culture in China. The huge 'Western industrial empire' has monopolized the international knowledge system for a long time. The main academic journals, publishers, literature databases and libraries gather in Europe and the United States. The principles of indigenous publishing, the interpretation of scientific research and the channels of information exchange are all controlled by the industrialized countries. The third world is a thorough knowledge consumer. Although after the founding of the People's Republic of China, especially after the reform and opening up, China's higher education has been struggling to explore the “Chinese model” of independence, innovation and development, affected by the globalization of Western culture, China's universities have always been wandering in contradictions and shocks, and still have not gotten rid of the stereotype of attachment. As Amartya Sen says, the Western dominant position in cultural affairs is still formidable despite the imperial authority of the world today[2]. From a global perspective, China is a well-deserved late-developing country, and the powerful forces from the outside induce the 'leap-forward' transformation of the educational society.

However, this radical breakthrough logic fundamentally deviates from the natural evolution order, resulting in the needs of the state, the nation and the society falling in the overlap of contradictions between tradition and modernity. If we only urgently pursue the “global standards” established by Western modern universities, cultural attachment is undoubtedly an unavoidable phenomenon.

3.2 Cultural Hegemony in Capital Operation Environment

In the context of globalization, the world’s higher education has been involved in the WTO rules, and the concept of nation-state has been damaged to a certain extent. Universities pursuing corporate logic have gradually formed transnational bureaucratic organizations with the purpose of “profit-making”. As a result, universities in the third world have to give up the cultural soil and environment where they ploughed the past. When the prestigious universities in western countries evolved into neo-colonialism in the world market, overseas study visits, international aid programs, and North-South institutional cooperation soon lost justice. Undoubtedly, the nature of capital is to achieve unlimited value-added. Western developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia have an absolute advantage in the world commodity market. They have successively transformed their remaining educational resources into cultural capital that can realize value proliferation, and have invested in overseas markets with economic capital. This highly deceptive unilateral trade is destroying the cultural spirit and values of the Third World University. At present, China is still the world’s largest developing country. Unsatisfied western capital tycoons and oligarchs are trying to entrap Chinese universities into the unjust capital regeneration system. As a disadvantage, we have to care about the contradiction between supply and demand of domestic higher education. Bill Readings once pointed out that it is not terrible for universities to integrate into society and the market. It is truly terrible to completely break under the market rules, and the intervention of market forces in the field of higher education should be limited[3]. Once our universities succumb to the market rules established by the WTO, blindly build high-rise buildings and make quick money, they will completely disappear in all kinds of educational projects constructed by Western capital, and the original university cultural structure will also be destroyed.

3.3 Difficult Cultural Construction under the Thought Collision between China and the West

American politician Samuel Huntington believes that university is deeply rooted in the specific national environment, and its knowledge production and dissemination are closely related to the traditional symbols and values of social culture[4]. In the historical corridor of “the eastward spread of Western learning”, Chinese universities have experienced the modernization transformation from transplanting Japan to imitating Europe to learning the United States. We are wandering in contradictions and conflicts. They have both practical destinations to learn from the West and are proud of their own orthodoxy. After being washed up by the national cultural genes, universities still largely maintain the Confucian view of state and knowledge. It is true that this life attribute endows universities with the logic of action to base themselves on their native place and absorb advanced culture. However, the university culture imported from the West is easy to “disagree”. There is no absolute objective justice in this cultural conflict. Market environment, instrumental value, short-term benefits and other factors may directly disrupt the relative balance of a certain period. Especially since the new century, globalization has no far-reaching boundaries. The instrumental rationality under the western “pragmatism” chariots has continued to tempt Chinese universities to pursue functional needs. In order to realize the technical purpose of adapting to and serving the society, the value orientation of “emphasizing apparatus and neglecting morality” has gradually been institutionalized. The cultural model based on western scientific knowledge is unconsciously depriving universities and individuals of their free will to cultural choices. On the whole, our universities have neither established a mature model with Chinese characteristics nor properly accepted the autonomy spirit under the first-class benchmark of the West. Behind the uncertain reality, there is a huge risk of the nihilism of higher education culture.

4. The Action Strategy of Establishing the Cultural Consciousness of World-class Universities with Chinese Characteristics

Conscious university culture is the spiritual pillar and organizational life source of top universities. How to grasp the law of cultural development to creatively transform Chinese university culture and realize the modernization leap from dependent development to independent, innovative and leading development is an important foundation and premise for the construction of world-class universities with Chinese characteristics.

4.1 Establishing Action Confidence in Cultural Choice of Reference and Transcendence

In today's world, higher education clusters are gradually dispersed from "one center" to "multi-center", and the transition from "center point" to "center surface". Universities have experienced similar and heterogeneous new identity, opportunities and challenges. For the construction of "double first-class" in the new era, we should be self-confident, consider the situation, firmly cultivate talents for the party and the country. First, the concept of "the rise and fall of the world, the responsibility of the husband", the social ideal of "the world is the public", the national spirit of "self-improvement and perseverance", the sense of urgency of "living in peace and thinking about danger", and the way of life of "harmony but difference" are deeply integrated into the gene of university culture to consolidate the theoretical basis and practical consensus of socialist university culture with Chinese characteristics. Secondly, following the consciousness of developing Marxism, based on the affirmation and negation of the objective existence of the present reality, taking root in the land of China, grasping the advantages and characteristics, abandoning the hesitation, inferiority and dependence, promoting the sublimation of university culture standard, and establishing and perfecting the cultural system of socialist universities with Chinese characteristics in the new era. Third, we should establish the academic belief, character style and educational feelings of university teachers and managers to help them better cultivate talents for the prosperity of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

4.2 Establishing Action Confidence in Cultural Choice of Reference and Transcendence

The world-class universities must take responsibility for the fate of the nation-state, and are not super factories that transmit general knowledge and technical experience. Based on the construction of "double first-class" in the new era, universities in China should condemn and consciously take responsibility for social abuses. First, take the initiative to shape a good social fashion. University is not a thermometer. It may not be entirely what society wants, but it must be what society needs. Regardless of material, behavior, institutional level of university culture, should be considered, vigilance and defense utilitarianism, money worship, official worship, academic rent-seeking and other chaos flood. Second, comprehensively deepen the philosophy and social science research. It is necessary to integrate multidisciplinary wisdom in theoretical system, academic viewpoints and scientific research methods, pay attention to the specific problems of social reform and development, strengthen theoretical research, and provide think tank power for cultural innovation of the country and regions. Third, precision service national development strategy. Facing the goal of the second century, we should consciously undertake the value mission in the revitalization of the nation-state, transform the strategic opportunity of national modernization development into the strategic opportunity of world-class university construction, achieve world-class university culture with Chinese characteristics in the rise of great powers, and promote the rise of great powers in the development of world-class university culture with Chinese characteristics.

4.3 Establishing Action Confidence in Cultural Choice of Reference and Transcendence

The development direction of higher education is closely related to the realistic goal and future direction of China's development. Adhering to the "four services" reflects not only the establishment and improvement of the university system, but also the continuous innovation of the

purpose of running a university and the concept of governance. For the construction of “double first-class” in the new era, we must uphold the principle of “one-way dominance and multiple complements”, cultivate the university spirit of academic freedom and autonomy, and explore a rigorous and rational university system with Chinese characteristics. First, following the humanistic logic, all major issues related to the reform and governance of universities and the livelihood of the society should play a leading role in the overall planning of the Party organizations in universities, support the principals to exercise their functions and powers independently and responsibly in accordance with the law, cooperate with all sectors of society, education management departments, colleges and departments under the university, run schools independently and manage independently in accordance with the law, and constantly improve the operation mechanism of self-supervision, self-restraint and self-development. Second, according to the location, level, type and other advantages and characteristics of the university, combined with the actual needs, the research base of characteristic cultural industry is established to coordinate the regional economic and social development of cultural industry clusters, so as to establish characteristic university cultural products and brands.

5. Conclusion

The most profound foundation of a university is undoubtedly its cultural perception, understanding and debate, and its strong consciousness of adapting to the new environment, understanding the new era and reconstructing the new culture. Facing the overall situation of the great rejuvenation strategy of the Chinese nation and the great changes in the world in the past century, based on the new development stage, implementing the new development concept and serving the new development pattern, and carefully examining the fundamental long-term problems related to society and culture are the significance basis for building a world-class university with Chinese characteristics.

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