

The Study of British College Education Tradition and Its Enlightenment to Modern Chinese Universities

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Abstract

In the heritage of the British classical university, British college is the main perpetrators and function carrier of British university personnel training. British college owns academic communities sharing a common interest, and is a cultural field of poetic dwelling, the self-government and self-consistent life style and the grace and liberal cultural atmosphere created the essence of the cultural community of the shaping elite. In this one continuous line of cultural community, the process of student continuing to pursue knowledge, is the process of their sharing a common history, a common culture and the shared feelings, shared experience and atmosphere. In short, they share a common lifestyle, and they have a common understanding of the soul of the nation. Civilization survives in the college which is as a cultural community. Thenational citizens cultivated by the college education as the human resources help the development of countries, which create a virtuous circle.

Key words: British college education; Modern Chinese universities; Enlightenment; Higher education Cultural community

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INTRODUCTION

The British college education tradition is not exclusive property of British higher education, even not just the wealth in the English world. As a distant medieval heritage of traditional education, the historical imprint of monastic ethos, its idea of liberal education, classical humanism national spirit heritage and the core of the cultural community construction, the British college education tradition has universal significance for the higher education in the whole world. More importantly, after the baptism of the enlightenment and the industrial revolution, and alteration of pragmatic philosophy in American universities, British Academy of traditional education has become a widely used idea, culture and system. Especially for the Chinese universities, the cultural tradition is not less than British ones. So in the field of higher education, to explore and maintain their traditional culture, we need to draw lessons from British Academy education in national heritage context; and in operation and the establishment of university, China is much more lagged behind than the United States. Therefore, it is necessary for us to refer to the higher education in the United States in how could US innovate and surpass higher education systems based on constant learning. Altogether, the inspiration given by the British Academy of traditional education to Chinese university is not the specific mode of operation, but rather how another culture and education reform can influence the choice and development path based on own culture and history.

1. PATH AND IDEA OF MODERN CHINESE UNIVERSITIES AND EXISTED PROBLEMS

From a historical perspective, Chinese higher education has a long history, but the molding of idea and system

of modern higher education in China is quite a late thing. From Qing dynasty's Peking Imperial University to nowadays, it is just about 100 years history, so it is a typical "latecomer". And the formation of modern Chinese university is not based on the nation's cultural roots and social systems, to a large extent, it is copied from Britain, Germany, America, Japan and other developed countries. Therefore, modern Chinese university can be called typical "exogenous".

1.1 The Growth and Revolution of Chinese Higher Education From the End of the 19th Century Until the Middle of 20th Century

Canada scholar, Professor Ruth Hayhoe thought that 19th century University of Asia can be seen as a "triumph of the European University" (Hayhoe, 2000). This assertion hits the essence of higher education development in modern China. Since the 19th century, with the expansion of Western colonialism, the European culture and the education industry has spread throughout the world. Also, the European higher education patterns guided by military hegemony and political hegemony are throughout most parts of the world. Due to the decline of its own culture and a strong invasion of foreign culture, late Qing dynasty of China had to face up to its all-round gap with the world powers. From self-uphold to self-doubt, and to comprehensive learning, the development of modern China has experienced a fundamental cultural change, in the same way, Chinese university basically went through this process. In late of the Qing dynasty, although the feudal regime realized the importance of learning from the culture and education of advanced countries, but based on the nature of the ruling regime, reformers were absolutely not willing to abandon the basic feudal imperial system and the centrality of the Confucian culture. This idea reflected in the founding of modern higher education is establishing Chinese university with reference to Japan's higher education system. Reason is simple, when Japan introduced advanced western systems and technology, it also reserved Imperial and traditional cultural values (Cobban, 1999).

The most typical case of this aspect is that the Qing government imitated Tokyo Imperial University and in 1898 founded the Qing dynasty's capital university. After the Xinhai revolution, the Qing dynasty ruined. China's feudal imperial power finally came to an end, then reformers can break the old mold and learn from the Western culture more in-depth. Because Japan's higher education system is borrowed from Franco-German universities, so Japan's higher education system naturally becomes example or model of Chinese universities. The most typical case of this aspect is that president of Peking university. Cai Yuanpei used the ideas of Germany university to reform old Peking University. Directly facing the advanced Western experience of

the modern university, university reform has achieved spectacular results in the early 20th century. Mr Cai Yuanpei's educational philosophy has become a legend in the history of education in China. Since then, a large number of intellectuals educated in America who had returned home entered University, and they introduced the educational philosophy of United States University to China, which combines the European academic tradition and American pragmatic style, which also created a new high in the history of higher education in China. However, because the era of semi-feudal and semi-colonial China fundamentally lacked of the soil of creating a perfect higher education system, although there are a few university was once very prosperous, but unexpected war hindered the growth of China university as a whole. Generally speaking, the end of the 19th century until the middle of 20th century, the creation and growth of Chinese higher education reflects the complex linkages between different cultures and economic models, but also under the influence of various colonial powers seeking economic and political interests in China, China began to learn from the west for practical purposes, in fact, it still was proud of its own culture, doubted Western academic tradition.

1.2 The Evolution of Chinese Higher Education From 1949

In 1949, the People's Republic of China established, China higher education ushered in a new development opportunity, the Chinese government finally had the chance to uniformly arrange and program a long-term higher education development program. In this regard, based on social reality and the development needs, Chinese Government has made a number of innovations, and has also made brilliant achievements. Admittedly, due to the ideological influence, China higher education once again took the route of "learning the west". Unlike before, the learning objects in this phase were not "imperialist western countries" but Soviet Socialist countries. In 1950s and 1960s, China higher education was to a large extent a direct copy of the former Soviet Union ideas and system, such practices were indeed showing significant effectiveness at that time. However, the fundamental problem remains unresolved, the educational systems originating from other countries, perhaps, can be utilized temporarily, but heterogeneous cultural values in the soil of Chinese culture will definitely produce a rejection. Now and for a long time before, some problems with Chinese university which has to be faced and reformed can be regarded as sequelae of this practice.

Since reform and opening up, Chinese society and the market has achieved economic boom and the comprehensive national power has also realized a significant enhancement, under the encouragement and stimulation of economic success, Chinese higher

education system bravely put forward the slogan of “coming into contact with the international rail” and “building the world-class university”, and gave a great deal of support in funding and policy. So far, the Chinese university has been ranked highest in the world in terms of size, and there is a few university closer to a “world class” category. However, along with the achievements, the fundamental questions still continue to torture the higher educators again and again—what is meant by Chinese universities, where is the creativity of cultural distinctiveness and value of Chinese university? It seems that lofty ideals and adequately fund are not able to find a suitable way out for the development of Chinese universities. Compared to Western universities, China universities are still unprepared in the promotion of cultural development and social change. And, the most worrying of all, the knowledge system and academic paradigm of China universities are almost entirely influenced by Western, in Atebahe words, Chinese higher education still belongs to “the edge” of world higher education.

What the scholars usually hang over the mouth are not only the thundering words of “western philosophy” but also the overseas sinologists. The book of *Confucius and Mencius* have many readers, Hong loumeng and Lu Xun are also cited, as to the related writings of contemporary scholars, I’m sorry, I have no time to read them, even though I read them, I disdain to cite them as well. Contemporary Chinese scholars seem to be all alone, with his back against the wall, gazing into the distance, dialogue with overseas scholars.

Current Chinese university is an obvious tension, that is to learn the advanced science and technology, providing direct services for economic and social benefits at the same time, to try to defend their traditional knowledge, and maintain their own cultural characteristics. This tension is the challenges and also opportunities for Chinese university reform and development. However, what never should happen is that Chinese scholars neglect and even betray the local culture. There is no denying that the creation of the modern university system must hold up with west, but the deeper Modern development of higher education should integrate its own culture into the construction of modern civilized society. Modern society and modern civilization are not the society and civilization dominated by a certain country or an individual culture. In an international perspective, each and every country and its modern educational system should pay attention to the communication and complementation between local culture and the foreign culture.

In this regard, the British tradition of college education has a significant inspiration to us. The idea of higher education must be closely combined with the cultural character of the nation, and young people should be familiar with the local civilization and have recognition of host culture.

2. THE CULTURAL PERSONALITY OF UNIVERSITY AND THE CULTURAL RESPONSIBILITY OF CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

Cultural personality is a kind of cultural attitude and value towards reality, and it is a deep and fixed cultural structure which is structured by the external environment. The cultural personality of the university refers to the long-term and stable behavior and cultural psychology of the people who are in university organization and the university cultural area. Since the middle ages in Europe began, university has gone through for 8 centuries and now still stands out majestically with vibrancy, and it has become the core institutions of modern society. It embodies the spirit of humanity, and bears the historical responsibility of knowledge development, and has significant cultural characters. Given the history traditional of university and its social function, the interpretation its culture characters should be interpreted from two aspects: On one hand, university, as the knowledge production center and academic research place ,which is the inner reason of university’s existence, should be analyzed from the diachronic perspective; on the other hand, university is as national education organization and social core institution , which is external identity by constant evolving, and it should be considered from the perspective of synchronicity.

2.1 The Inner Cultural Personality of University

From the perspective of diachronic, the inner reason of university itself existence is its inner cultural personality which has the characteristic of generality. Firstly, this derives from a historical fact that university originated from medieval European Christian churches which aimed to train talent for church and spread religious ideas for church. Because of the world spirit of Christian and the supra-mundane cultural character of theological studies, medieval university has preliminarily laid a cultural personality of learning without borders and research without barriers. Secondly, the generality of university’s inner cultural personality also depends on its constantly fundamental tasks—scientific research and knowledge production. University is a community which consists of scholars and students focusing on the career of seeking the truth. Any real university consists of three closely related and inseparable aspects: Knowledge teaching science and academic research, as well as creative and cultural life. Because of the objectivity of the scientific research and the normativity of the knowledge production, in the long-term development process university gradually has formed a tradition of expressing intellectual passions and showing the tradition of scientific spirit through the comprehensive observation and the thinking in accordance with the methodology,

as well as the self-criticism of objectivity training, and has formed stable cognitive paradigms and values orientation. This cultural personality will not disappear or change for regime change and the development of production models, in fact, it is precisely because of this kind of cultural character, when religious and theology exited from the secular life, the feudal system finally turned into ashes and the human society developed into the information age, universities can still be able to retain their unique inner qualities (Yang, 2012).

2.2 The Particular Cultural Personality of University

From the perspective of the synchronic function of university, the cultural personality of university has the characteristic of specificity. University is not only an incorporation organization aiming to achieve basic will-to-know of human, but also a national institution which has social power and the responsibility of progress. Since the naissance of university, it has gone through three typical development, namely “ivory tower”, “research institute” and “service station”. Given the different historical and cultural traditions, different political system and economic development levels between countries, the public roles played by universities in various countries are varied, naturally their natural personalities are different. From the perspective of the external social, university is a social organism’s vital organs, is the source of knowledge development and scientific innovation, is the energy-source of modern socio-economic development and the improvement of the degree of democracy, so its culture has the characteristics of national self-consciousness and social guidance. As the United Kingdom philosopher Lord Haldane said, “University is a reflection of national soul”, culture character and national character of the University can not be separated, and the most typical case in this respect is that the British college always sticks to its cultural traditions (Deng & Cui, 2012.)

Based on the above discussion, the core enlightenment of the British college education tradition to Chinese university actually is that university must stick to its own cultural responsibilities. First of all, in accordance with the inherent universality perspective, university is the academic forum and the kingdom of spirits with free thought and free conception, moreover, university has the abilities of cultural autonomy, of cultural reflection and of cultural criticism, which determines the Chinese University to firmly establish their own cultural self-confidence and cultural awareness, maintain the independence and autonomy of the academic research. Because of this, Chinese university must pay attention to the cultivation of university spirit and the creation of academic concept, and as a scientific and cultural knowledge producers and innovators who should coordinate and contact knowledge, to evaluate and

disseminate the culture with its interacting ability based on university. Therefore, Chinese university should provide people with support and content for the double construction of the Chinese technology and culture citizenship. The core of the university culture is to form academic tradition, and academic tradition is the basis of the construction of academic system, in turn, the construction of academic system is conducive to the care of academic tradition. Therefore, Chinese university must make efforts in two ways at the same time: inheriting academic tradition and fostering academic philosophy, as well as the design and construction of the university system. Secondly, based on the specialty of the university cultural personality and the character of social identity giving, Chinese university should keep a foothold in the specific culture tradition and culture form, and think independently and perform a function and undertake responsibility in its own culture system and spatio-temporal coordinates, but should not take some world popular construction concept nowadays as standard system, ignoring the differences of spirit and history (Deng & Cui, 2012).

As a teaching place and educational institution, university is the bonds of national development and survival of civilization. When it kept its inner cultural personality, it has been participating in the whole process of social development and the dissemination and heritage of national culture. If comparing the university to a towering old tree, the soil it roots in is the distant and deep national culture, stronger branches tell the past and future of the university, the dense tree rings in the trunk engrave the development history of nation and civilization. It can be said that a history of the university is also a history of contemporary civilization and country. And the development history of British university most typical and incisively embodies the relationship among the University and State and civilization. The British classical university who takes the college education as the core future is a combination of national development and the survival of civilization. In the heritage of the British classical university, British college is the main perpetrators and function carrier of British university personnel training. British college owns academic communities sharing a common interest, and is a cultural field of poetic dwelling, the self-government and self-consistent life style and the grace and liberal cultural atmosphere created the essence of the cultural community of shaping elite. In this one continuous line of cultural community, the process of student continuing to pursue knowledge, is the process of their sharing a common history, a common culture and shared feelings, shared experience and atmosphere. In short, they share a common lifestyle, and they have a common understanding of the soul of the nation. Civilization survives in the college which is as a cultural national citizens cultivated by college education as the

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