

Internal Governance Structure of “Double First-class” Universities in China

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Universities in China have been implementing large-scale higher education reform to construct a modern university system with Chinese characteristics. The present study explores the relationships of political, administrative, and academic power based on data analysis of China’s first batch of “double first-class” universities. Internal governance structure reform has achieved good results to adapt to the scale expanding. Chinese universities need to legalize governance structures, promote the autonomous operation of universities and the democratization of governance policies, and pursue the de-administration of their academic affairs and regulate their academic power in the system.

Keywords: research-oriented universities, governance structure, academic power, de-administration

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the direction of the educational system and higher education reform has been closely related to economic globalization and market forces. Encouraging academic freedom and reviewing government powers has become the choice of higher education governance reforms in many countries and regions. Braun and Merrien (1999) have conducted joint case studies on the UK, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Italy, the USA, and Switzerland to track state-led higher education's political and internal progress. They believed that modern managerialism is a new type of state intervention, including state, university, and scholar levels.

Government intervention remains the main action in the context of Chinese higher education. In the macro context, a series of projects and policies have been adopted to optimize internal governance structure and improve the efficiency of organizational operations. After introducing into the higher education system, these policies and suggestions have aroused the concerns of Chinese and international academic circles on the quality of Chinese higher education. The main purpose of this study is to analyze the basic conditions and existing problems of the internal governance structure and relationship of Chinese universities and explore the institutional factors and institutional barriers that affect the effectiveness of governance. In the nearly twenty years of development of China’s higher education, how does the internal governance structure

of Chinese universities work? What is the relationship between political, administrative, and academic powers and other dimensions?

Some researchers pointed out that the US model has been copied and learned much, and the importance of delegating powers to lower levels has been recognized. Sporn (1999) indicated that many higher education systems, especially in Europe and Asia, introduced the Anglo-Saxon and US models to reform the educational systems based on the traditional models, with China and Japan being no exception. Is this real? This paper aimed to answer this question by exploring the relationship between administrative power and academic power in the governance of higher education in Chinese universities. Meanwhile, many studies remind us that the purpose of university governance reform is to improve academic ability and enhance academic autonomy. Neave (1995) emphasized the importance of university autonomy in achieving its goals.

At the same time, an institution will prove to be more efficient if it gains greater autonomy. The institution mentioned here refers to an organization and its existing practice. Chana and Yang (2018) point out that greater autonomy and flexibility are feasible in the opinions of both governments and universities. Does academic freedom and delegation of academic power to lower levels relate to the development of university reforms based on the experience of the USA, Hong Kong & Taiwan in China? This question has raised the researcher's interest in the current university governance reforms. Especially in China and other parts of Asia, whether empirical support on the practical higher education environment has been obtained?

Decentralization Governance

To pursue the effectiveness of local economic development, the USA has decided to decentralize to lower levels in terms of higher education governance. McLendon and Hearn (2009) concluded that "decentralization to lower levels" would be controlled in all regions. The coordination within the scope of the entire state would be coordinated with loose program control to seek local economic efficiency and effectiveness. Neave (1995) wrote that in contemporary American universities, the traditional governance buildings of a university are its trustees, administrative and teaching staff, other groups, and organizations. In an article, Chana and Yang (2008) wrote that the three Es, namely effectiveness, economy, and efficiency, aim to improve institutional autonomy and enhance government control over the results.

Hong Kong has always been deemed as a regulated region. The government's least intervention and free and unrestrained economic orientation are considered public administration and welfare management (Lo, 2017). Neoliberalism proposed a psychological form in which audit, accounting, and management technology play a positive role in the governance of a state to achieve the goals of freedom, choice, competition, and individual sovereignty. In this sense, the market has always been regarded as the ultimate solution for social distribution and regulation (Olssen and Peter, 2005). Mok (2008) concluded that the Hong Kong Government operates under the model of economic liberalism by playing the role of the market driver to avoid the intervention with the higher education market. The move attracted both local and non-local students. Students raise tuition fees through private financing such as loans.

However, absorbing too many non-local students increases the difficulty of local students in competing for resources and employment opportunities and creates heavy debt. Thus, the failure of the Hong Kong government to directly provide funds to universities has become a major gap. Lo (2017) summarized that the relatively common role of the government in higher education expenditure had become a major constraint of Hong Kong universities to compete for a large proportion in global higher education. Then, he emphasized the concept of an accountability system and asked China to strengthen its role in monitoring and to supervise higher education quality.

Taiwan still maintains a traditional academic culture related to universities and joint governance (Chen, 2004). Chana and Yang (2018) find that teachers and staff serve as chairmen of university committees and councils and hold administrative positions at different levels. Academic peers tend to make decisions on major issues and plan for the future; Teachers prefer a bureaucratic environment controlled by the university system, which would give the university a fully self-management capability in legally independent entities. Privatization and commercialization are widely accepted as a philosophy of university governance in Taiwan.

Government Intervention

The main characteristics of China's higher education are still more bureaucracy and political overtones. In China, we have seen a more administrative-oriented higher education institution (Wang, 2011). What should be highlighted is that bureaucracy may lead to university corruption. Osipian (2017) investigated the autonomy of universities in Ukraine. He believes that students from low- and medium-income families are deprived of access to enter top universities due to the higher degree of corruption of higher education enrollment and high tuitions. Lin (2011) emphasized that Chinese higher education is undergoing an audit process. The trend shows that this big country is striving to combine its bureaucratic style of work with auditing techniques to guide the development of Chinese higher education from the perspective of the State's will.

China's higher education features dual governance and collective leadership. The central government leads all institutions in a unified manner and supports the performance of responsibilities (Huang, 2018). Through unremitting efforts, Chinese universities have made remarkable achievements in visual achievements in building world-class universities. However, they are still weak in intangible cultural capital. The cultural construction of world-class universities with Chinese characteristics aims at world-class universities and highlights the ideals and pursuit of Chinese universities (Li and Gao, 2021). It is worth noting that more powers of autonomy are granted to some institutions, especially in providing academic courses and reorganization of academies. The dominant power of the national government has been strengthened, and the diversified and independent development of colleges and universities has been limited (Wang, 2021). To guarantee the quality of educational activities, the Central Government has also introduced the evaluation system for self-assessment and external evaluation to ensure the quality of educational activities and its strong influence on some institutions (Huang, 2006).

Theory of Governance Types

Governance types are categorized in different ways. When studying the governance structure of universities, the international academic circle mainly holds the views of holism, dualism, and pluralism. Holism is represented by the research conducted by Clark (2001), a higher education expert of the University of California, Los Angeles. He believes that the governance structure has the characteristics of separation of administration culture and culture of teachers and students in the academic system. The decision-making institutions and groups at all levels of higher education have academic power. Dualism dominates the internal governance of universities. Corson (1961) was the earliest who has focused on and proposed the co-existence of the section-level power structure and professional power structure in universities. Ma (2015) pointed out that the power of the universities is divided into two dimensions, namely administrative and academic, and is enjoyed and exercised by two different types of entities. She also stated that American universities' departments, school, and university levels have a dual governance structure. Based on the dual governance structure theory, the Chinese academic research circle combines the political power of the independent existence of Chinese universities. With the central government as the representative, the internal governance structure of Chinese universities is divided into political, administrative, and academic aspects. Currently, the imbalance between administrative and academic powers is the core issue Chinese universities must face in internal governance.

Based on the above research at home and abroad, this paper further analyzes China's higher education management. At the same time, 137 double-first-class universities announced by the Ministry of Education in 2017 were selected as the respondents. According to the Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China revised in 2015, a questionnaire survey was conducted from four perspectives of central government leadership reflecting political power. The principal accountability system embodies administrative power, the function of the academic committee embodies academic power, and the supervision function of the representative teacher committee embodies democratic rights. Ideas and comments were collected from existing university governance teachers, staff members, other administrative personnel, and students of universities. Questionnaire feedback is used to analyze Chinese universities' governance and demonstrate the validity of our theoretical support. Finally, conclusions were drawn.

METHODS

This study used 137 “double first-class” universities announced by the Ministry of Education of China as the survey objects. Paper and electronic questionnaires, phone and social networking software and other survey forms were combined in this research. “Teachers” and “staff members” were considered analytical units. The surveyed teachers or staff members were requested to respond to university governance structure issues, academic committees’ operating status, and teacher’s representative committees they considered. The Linkert 5-point scale was used in the questionnaires. Each measurement item scores from 1 (strongly disagreed) to 5 points (completely agreed) and consisted of four parts, namely basic data, governance structure issue analysis, operating status of the academic committee, and operating status of teacher’s representative committee.

First, basic data for respondents in an organization was given, such as career type, administrative post, number, and ratios of respondents. Respondents were then requested to comment on the issues regarding university governance structure and adjust the degree. This section consists of 7 items. Next, the respondents were requested to express their opinions and adjust the operating status of the academic committees. There are five items in this section. Finally, they were requested to express their thoughts or feelings on the operating status of the representative teacher committees. There are also five items in this section.

Participants

A sampling of respondents from different types of universities is critical. Teachers of different grades and employees at different administrative levels were included. A total of 137 leading universities were included in the survey, with samples from the “985 Project” and “211 Project” universities and other leading universities. The samples included 1,092 teachers from 137 universities. The number of respondents was better, and there were many valid questionnaires. In addition, safeguard measures were taken on the questionnaire quality of this survey. The researchers had confidence in the final results of this research.

All the previous “Project 985” and “Project 211” universities were covered in the 137 universities. It can be seen that the 137 “double-first rate” universities are typical among the survey samples, which can reflect the characteristics of the management system after the further reform of the internal governance system in China since the 1990s. In addition, the origins and development of 137 universities vary. Peking University, Tsinghua University, and other high-level research universities and general industrial universities are among the first-class universities, which can better reflect the requirements of sample coverage required by the survey in terms of type, scale, and level.

Table 1 shows the distribution of all respondents. In terms of type, 44.69% of the respondents were teachers, including 13.37% teachers with senior titles, 22.80% teachers with vice-senior titles, and 8.52% teachers of intermediate titles and below. About 55.31% were staff members, including 5.86% university leaders, 14.47% were division-level leaders, 16.21% were deputy division-level leaders, 18.77% were section-level leaders. Respondents were evenly distributed and highly representative, meeting the data integrity requirements required by the survey. The basic information of the questionnaire survey sample is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
BASIC DATA OF QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY SAMPLES

	Type of personnel	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Teachers	Senior title	146	13.37%
	Vice-senior title	249	22.80%
	Intermediate title and below	93	8.52%
	Subtotal of teachers	488	44.69%

	University leaders	64	5.86%
	Division-level leaders	158	14.47%
Staff members	Deputy division-level leaders	177	16.21%
	Section-level leaders	205	18.77%
	Subtotal of staff members	604	55.31%
	Total	1092	100.00%

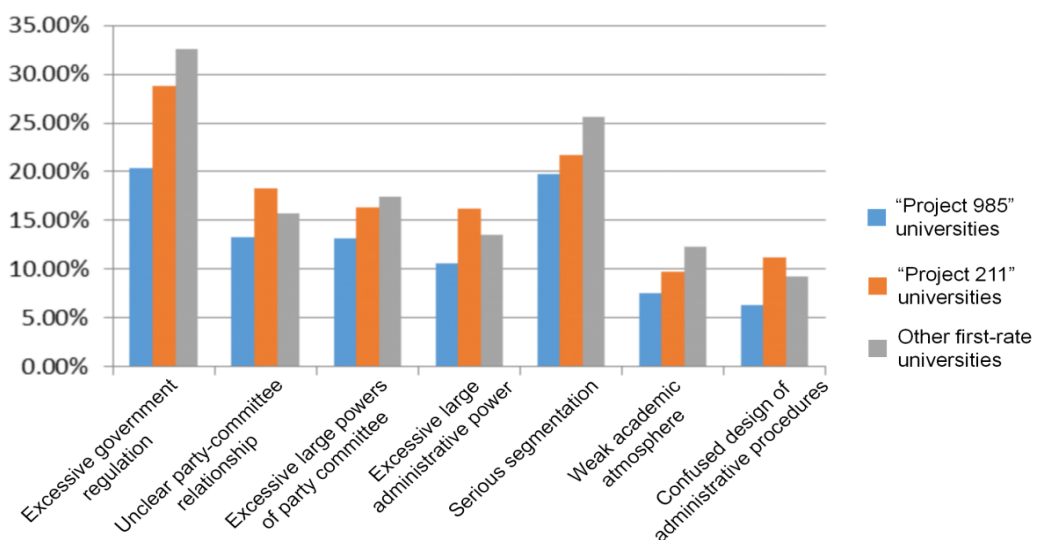
Measures

There are two types of questionnaire surveys. First, 1,200 copies of the paper and electronic questionnaires were distributed to respondents from 137 first-class universities. After deleting the invalid important data loss from 816 questionnaires, the remaining 758 questionnaires were collected for demographic analysis. Secondly, according to the static analysis of the first survey, 382 questionnaires were obtained using targeted telephone and social networking software. These questionnaires were used to increase and compensate for the respondent information uncovered in the first survey or that of universities which were insufficiently covered in the first survey to make the survey data complete. Finally, after 48 invalid questionnaires in which answers were carelessly given were removed, the information of 1,092 questionnaires obtained from the two surveys was combined for demographic analysis. It ensures the quality of the questionnaire, ensuring that the survey accurately reflects the credibility of the surveyed project and results.

FINDINGS

This section reviews the statistical results of the questionnaire. The first part focuses on the governance structure of the universities. Degree adjustments are made on different items, and the impacts of government regulation, academic atmosphere, and operation of the party-government system are analyzed. The second part analyzes the operating status of academic committees in Chinese universities through five projects. Finally, the third part analyzes the operating status of the representative teacher committees. The data analyzed below is the average of the data collected from three types of universities.

FIGURE 1
PROBLEM ANALYSIS OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF UNIVERSITIES

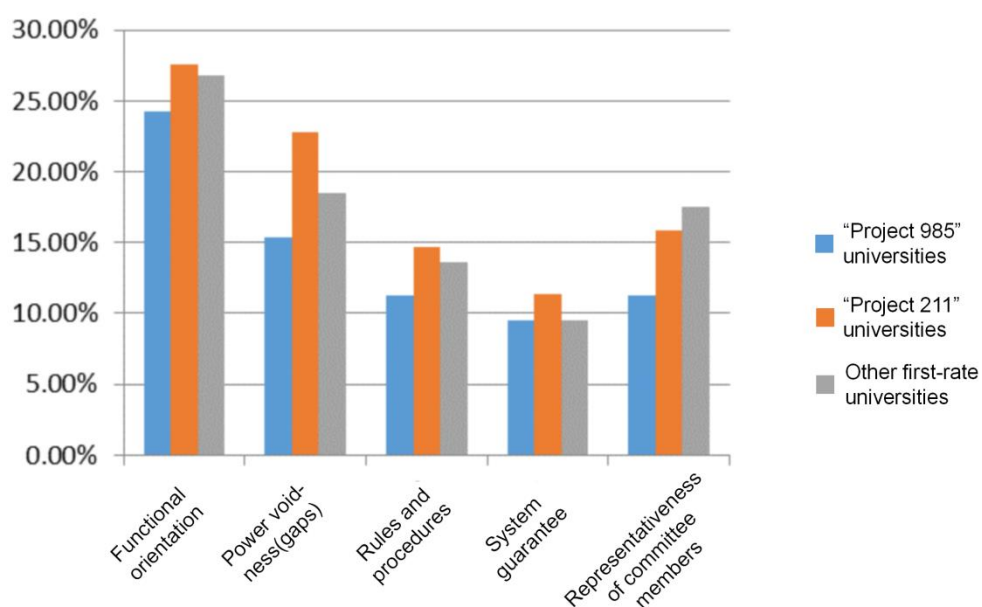


As can be seen from Fig. 1, the operational status of the Chinese university governance structure is generally satisfactory. 70.03%, 25.16%, and 4.81% of respondents respectively believe that they are in good operating condition, average and bad and that some institutional obstacles affecting governance efficiency generally exist. As shown in Fig. 1, the problems are mainly reflected in six perspectives: government regulation, party-government relation, and power centralization, lack of system, administrative procedure design, and academic atmosphere. About 27.2% of respondents believe that the government represented by the education authorities exerts excessive control over university affairs, which are not conducive to university development. Nearly 15.78% of respondents believe that the unclear division of political and administrative powers and unharmonious party-government relationship at universities hinder the development of universities.

Among the respondents, 15.64% consider that the Party secretary, who represents political power, is granted too much power, which will have a negative impact on the administration and academic freedom of the university. About 33.44% of the respondents believed that the university administration interfered excessively in academic affairs and was "offside." At the same time, about 22.36 percent of respondents believe in serious differences between central governments and administrative systems. About 9.84% of the respondents believe that universities are characterized as public institutions and lack an academic atmosphere. Around 8.95% of the respondents believe that colleges and universities' problematic administrative procedure design has affected the operational efficiency of colleges and universities. That shows the generally good governance structure and relationship of Chinese universities. There is a large space for them to improve, though.

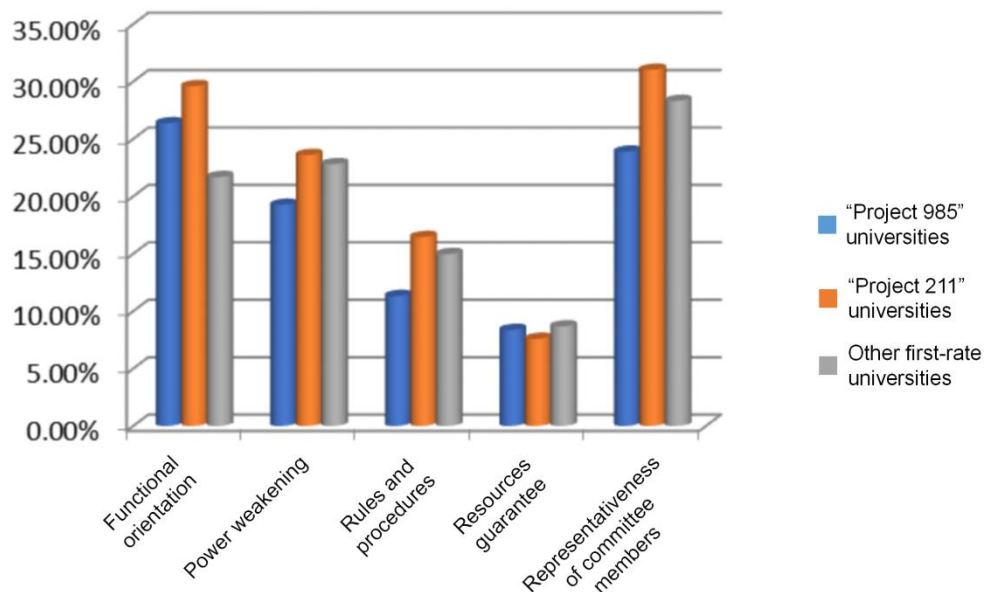
The second part of the questionnaire focuses on the functioning of the Academic committees (from now on referred to as "committees"). The survey results are shown in Fig. 2. 27.36%, 56.24%, and 16.4% of respondents believe that the operating status of the committees and their functions are positive, average, and negative. As shown in Fig. 2, committees have varying degrees of functional orientation, power gaps, rules and procedures, system safeguards, and representativeness of committee members. 26.21% of the respondents believe that the functional orientation of committees deviates from their governance structure orientation, making them play an insufficient role in academic affairs. 18.9% of the respondents believe that academic and administrative power is not equal in position.

FIGURE 2
OPERATING STATUS OF ACADEMIC COMMITTEES



However, the powers of the committees are fully reflected in the university charter. They become void in the actual implementation. 13.16% of respondents believe that the substantial decision-making power is insufficient as the Party committees' decision-making is procedural post-event decision-making. About 10.17% of respondents believe that the organization of the committees is incomplete. 14.9% of the respondents believe that the representatives of the committee members are low, and they are affected and restricted by administrative power, so they cannot fully represent scholars. Overall, the operating status of the academic committees of Chinese universities is not quite satisfactory, and the problems are mainly reflected in the academic decision-making power of committees. A total of 45.11% of respondents believe that committees' roles in academic affairs are insufficient due to their insufficient academic decision-making power. The above results indicate that the operating status of the academic committees of Chinese universities is not quite satisfactory.

FIGURE 3
OPERATING STATUS OF TEACHER'S REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEES



If turning to the operating status of the representative teacher committees, the survey result is shown in Fig. 3. The operating status and functions of the representative teacher committees of China are not quite satisfactory. Only 19.5%, 48.6%, and 31.9% of respondents believe the status good, average and bad, respectively. As shown in Fig. 3, the problems are mainly reflected in power weakening, functional orientation, system and mechanism, representativeness. About 25.88% of the respondents believed that representative teachers' committees did not supervise major school reforms, major decisions, and important tasks, and their role was limited. At the same time, 21.89% of the respondents believe that the power of the representative Teachers' committee to represent teachers and staff's rights and interests has been weakened. About 14.25% of respondents believe that the organizational mechanism of the representative teacher committee is incomplete. While about 27.74% of the respondents believe that the representatives in the representative teacher committee are not reasonable, and the representatives acted by ordinary teachers are insufficient. Another 8.67% of respondents believe that universities fail to exploit the role of the representative teacher committees due to their deficiency of resources.

DISCUSSION

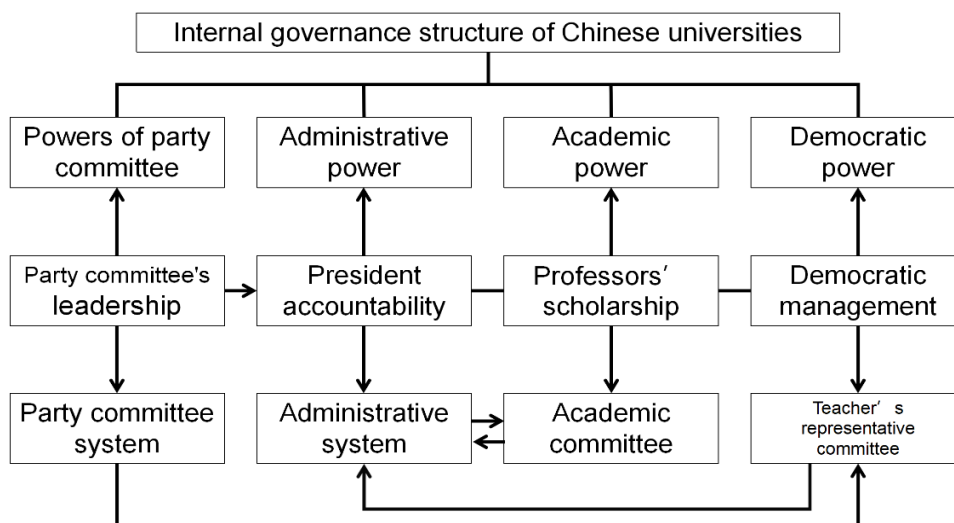
This section discusses the current state of internal governance in Chinese universities. The results show that the internal governance structure of Chinese universities with comprehensive governance characteristics is very different from the internal governance structure of Western universities. In the meantime, the system synergy between administrative and academic powers is also discussed. Results indicate that administrative and academic powers overlap to some extent. Thus, administrative power would undoubtedly affect academic behaviors. However, the party and the state have established a university academic committee supporting academic freedom.

Physical Presentation of the Governance Structure

The governance structure of Chinese universities can be described as an organized non-anarchy. The famous management scientist March (2011) described the governance structure of universities (mainly American universities) as organized anarchy. The governance structure is a relatively fixed main framework formed in the configuration, operation, and supervision of governance power presented as a specific organizational or social relationship. According to modern organizational theory, an organization's governance structure is mainly divided into polymerized and integrated. The former highlights the decentralization, while the latter emphasizes the centralization of power. Both governance structure types vary in organization form, decision-making mechanism, operational procedures, and governance structure. American scholar Birnbaum (2003) previously proposed the organization operation models of universities, including society, bureaucracy, political party, and anarchy. The survey results indicate western universities are aggregative and have obvious characteristics of decentralization. In contrast, Chinese universities have an integrated governance structure with teaching test integration as the main and teaching test separation as the combination.

As shown in Fig. 4, the political, administrative, and academic powers and democratic rights in the governance structure of Chinese universities are implemented via the Party committee leadership, presidential accountability, professorships, and democratic management. Here are corresponding organizations in the four governance dimensions, namely the central government system, the administrative system, the academic committee, and the representative teacher committee, guaranteeing their powers. In addition, the powers of different dimensions are never independent of each other but have the division of labor and cooperation.

FIGURE 4
STATUS OF THE INTERNAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF CHINESE UNIVERSITIES



More importantly, it must be acknowledged that the integration and polymerization of governance structure only represents an ideal abstract classification. In actual governance, excessively concentrated or decentralized power can affect the effectiveness of organizational operations. Although centralization can improve execution, it can easily lead to power abuse and corruption. It will also increase the risk and uncertainty of decision-making. D. Wrong (2001) pointed out that when sufficient power monopolizes decision-making and actions, power must be dispersed to limit the power and avoid abuse of power.

Universities should establish a long-term decision-making mechanism, support mechanism, evaluation mechanism, supervision mechanism and collaborative innovation mechanism to provide all-around participation space for the internal and external subjects to promote the construction of "double world-class." In practice, colleges and universities must be based on the three levels of value system and behavior and follow the principles of value orientation, standardization, gradualism, multiple cooperation and cross-nationality. It is important to adhere to the basic path of independent management of universities, government guidance, enterprise cooperation and innovation. Through the efforts of scholars, coordination of social organizations and the support of the public, an orderly pattern of diversified social subjects participating in the construction of "double world-class" has been formed (Yang, 2021).

Through the investigation, combined with issued by the competent department of the Ministry of Education and other five about downsizing and decentralized organization, administration, and the separation of higher education, optimizing the combination of several opinions of the reform of service, the guiding principles of Chinese university governance structure to solve the following three questions: one is to strengthen the leadership of the party, the elaboration of the central government and the President's power and responsibility; Second, perfect the academic governance system and guarantee the academic decision-making power of the academic committee; Third, improve the democratic management mechanism, strengthen the supervision and guarantee of the power of the committee of substitute teachers.

Status Expression of Internal Governance Relationship

Through investigations, it is found that the internal governance relationship at Chinese universities is mainly reflected in three aspects, namely division of labor, system synergy, and protection of rights. These three aspects are mutually coordinated and complementary and enable internal governance's consciousness, self-conducting, and autonomy. The structural status of governance reflects the overall pattern of power operation, and the state of governance reflects the expression mechanism of power operation. In the process of internal governance of the university, the specific governance relationship may be expressed as a complex mode in which power is restricted by power, the system is restricted by power, and rights restrict rights

Relationship Between Political and Administrative Powers

Sometimes, due to a lack of understanding, leadership style, decision-making mechanism, and other factors, it is difficult for central governments and administrative departments to reach an agreement on many specific issues in a short period. According to statistical analysis, 58.9% of respondents believe that the central government plays a big role in core political leadership in many major universities' decisions. About 61.1% of the respondents believe the administrative system represented by the president is entitled to independent execution of the central government's decision, which shows the good relationship between political and administrative powers in Chinese universities. This paper argues that Chinese universities' political and administrative power is never a restriction but is responsible for different tasks under the same power. This kind of relationship mechanism better solves the problem of power restriction and inefficiency in the decentralization restriction.

Relationship Between Administrative and Academic Powers

According to our survey, the academic committee and their functions are not very satisfactory. Administrative power remains to play a dominating role in the academic affairs of Chinese universities. A total of 43.9% of the respondents believe that academic committees have insufficient academic decision-making power and play an insufficient role in academic affairs. By the Higher Education Law, the Outline

of the National Medium-and Long-Term Program for Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) issued in 2010 and the Regulations on Academic Committees of Higher Education Providers promulgated by the Ministry of Education of China in 2014, the academic power of Chinese universities is realized by teaching and scholarship and in the form of the decision-making power of academic committees in discipline construction, academic evaluation, academic development and learning style building.

In terms of governance structure, Chinese universities' academic and administrative power is mutually reciprocal on the structure level from the perspective of governance structure. The former is restricted by the latter. However, in the process of governance, universities have the characteristics of an academic organization; there is a natural intersection between academic power and administrative power; the academic committee of the university is separated from the administrative system, and there is no condition for independent work. It also shows that in this survey, most of the full-time teachers believe that the internal governance of Chinese universities works well on the one hand, and on the other hand, denies the excessive administrative interference of administrative power in academic affairs.

Management and Supervision of Democratic Rights

Another problem reflected in the data is that teachers have less power to represent committees. About 52.0% of the respondents believe that the teacher's representative committee is weak in powers and has an insufficient role. It demonstrates that the representative teacher committee is a weak organization within the internal governance structure of the universities, and the universities fail to implement the provisions of the party and the State on the representative teacher committee. There are specific explanations on the functions of the representative teacher committees in the Trade Union Law, Labor Law, Education Law, Higher Education Law, and Teachers Law of China. The Regulations on the Teacher's Representative Committees of Universities proposes more explicitly the rights of the representative teacher committee to listen to important reforms and tasks of the universities such as formulation of articles of the association, development plan, annual work, etc., and to propose comments and suggestions.

In addition, although most of the respondents believe that the role of the representative teacher committee is too inadequate, the representative teacher committee pays much less attention than administrative and academic power. As a basic form of democratic management of Chinese universities, the representative teacher committee plays an indispensable role in supervising major reforms of universities and needs to attract the attention of universities and the academic circle.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This research is mainly limited to the analysis scale and scope. Only higher education governance of Chinese universities is paid attention to, and other organizations in the education system are not considered. However, the same system enjoys a similar style. Additionally, despite the small scope of the survey, the quality assurance questionnaire design allows respondents to represent the whole better. It shows that China's higher education governance has serious problems such as a low degree of academic autonomy and poor operating status of the representative teacher committee. Government intervention is still the main feature of governance. In the case of separation of powers in universities, the central government and the administrative system lack supervision and full coordination. Universities should further strengthen their leadership. At the same time, follow the central government's Regulations on Internal Supervision and formulate and implement detailed rules for implementing the Presidential accountability system under the leadership of central governments.

According to the analysis and research results, although the status and role of the academic committees of Chinese universities have been improved, there is still a large gap between the existing power operation and ideal status. The main means of solving the institutional obstacle is to strengthen system building. It is imperative to clarify the scope and boundaries of academic power and solve the "offside" problem of academic power. On a global scale, matching executive power and academic power at world-class universities is quite reasonable. According to the articles of association of 114 universities examined and

approved by the Ministry of Education in 2015, the universities under the ministries of China have formulated specific regulations on the duties, functions, and organizations of academic committees.

The representative teacher committee is an organization that guarantees and safeguards teachers and staff members' legal rights and benefits. It is an important organization for avoiding power abuse in the integrated governance structure. As far as the internal governance structure of world-class universities is concerned, it is necessary to strike a balance between rights and powers that are restricted by power. In the future, Chinese universities should further highlight and support the work of teachers' representative committees. At the same time, they should strengthen lead group building and faculty team building and ensure the system's implementation and power of teachers' representative committees through internal management.

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