YAN Guangcai

The construction of the Chinese academic system: Its history and present challenges

Abstract The rise and development of China’s academic system is a process that started from “passively accepting Western Learning” to today’s “catching up with Western Learning and even exceeding it”. In the last century, China experienced a turbulent and unstable social environment in which academics and politics have always been intertwined. As a result, the internal logic of China’s academic system shares similar characteristics with its Western models, but is unique in certain ways at the same time. In the complex and inseparable relationship between academics and politics, which involves both love and hate, the logic that academics must serve political needs, on one hand, establishes the co-existence of the academy and the government, which provides a relatively stable environment for academic activities within the system; on the other hand, it also jeopardizes the ecological environment in which the academics can develop according to its own internal logic. For exactly the same reasons, even at present, internalization means something special and complex for Chinese academia because, on one hand, it truly represents academia’s strive to meet international standards; on the other hand, the pushing factor behind this “voluntary” stance is still state and political power.

Keywords academic system, internationalization, system construction, history

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YAN Guangcai (✉)
Institute of Higher Education Research, East China Normal University, Shanghai 200062, China
E-mail: yanguangcai21@163.com
逻辑，一方面促成了学术界与国家间的共生关系，因而使得体制内的学术获得了相对稳定的保障；另一方面，又破坏了它自主构建的生态。也正因为如此，在今天，国际化对于中国学术界而言有着更为特殊的复杂内涵，它的确代表了学术界所谓与国际接轨的一种姿态，但这种“主动”姿态背后的主要推手却依旧是政治与国家。

关键词 学术制度，国际化，制度建构，历史

1 Introduction

The term “academic system” refers to a series of rules and regulations, both written and assumed, that are developed in the course of academic activities that encourage or constrain scholars’ certain behaviors.

The system of the modern academic activities usually follows two logics. Firstly, it resembles autonomous logic and agrees with the internal logic of the production, division, and integration of knowledge. It is the production and division of knowledge that facilitates the formation of the structure of the disciplines. In turn, that formation makes scholars’ activities organized, specialized, and even elite. This structure makes the identity of scholars relatively stable. For example, scholars may belong to certain academic organizations or agencies. Organized behaviors require scholars to follow rules which may come from a single discipline or even the entire academic community, or may come from the agencies to which scholars belong to. These rules may be conventional and assumed, or maybe written formally. The second characteristic of the logic of academic activities (the so-called external logic) is the interference or even dominance of political and economic forces. This logic refers to the phenomenon by which scholars’ behaviors, more or less, are brought into the power struggle or national ideology that are outside the discipline, such as the direct administrative management and control from the government as well as the indirect guidance and influence from the government in the form of funding research and issuing academic awards. There are contradictions and conflicts in the two logics from time to time, but that does not mean they cannot coexist; in fact, under certain circumstances, they may go hand in hand. From a historical perspective and through an analysis of the relationship between these two logics, this article aims to help understand the meaning of the construction of the current Chinese academic system.

2 The beginning of the modern Chinese academic system

The formulation of disciplines is the foundation of the construction of an