



Conflict between Administrators and Academics in Chinese University

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Introduction

In 2021, the Chinese government officially incorporated the enhancement of higher education quality into the national-level social development plan, outlining it as a long-term goal for the year 2035 (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2021). Chapter 43 of this plan delineates specific measures aimed at achieving the goals for the development of higher education quality. The government seeks to guide universities in reconfiguring their existing management structures and instituting new systems and regulations to catalyze potential transformative actions within these institutions. Consequently, influenced by governmental initiatives, internal changes in university management have become an unavoidable trend (Bie, 2021). University administrators are obliged to formulate education quality objectives in alignment with national policy documents, establishing a set of evaluation indicators to govern and oversee quality (Yu and Yin, 2023). Scholars, acting as both educators and contributors to academic knowledge, assume a pivotal role in elevating the standard of higher education (Hu, 2005). However, collaborations between two groups with disparate needs, motivations, and interests, within the organizational context of a university, inevitably give rise to conflicts (Rai and Singh, 2021). Ignoring or indulging in these conflicts would counteract the overarching goal of achieving high-quality education. Against this backdrop, this study delves into the issue through the lens of management theory and real-world examples, divided into three parts. The initial segment is a literature review, providing an overview of the problem and its contextual background while identifying relevant theories and models. Subsequently, the researcher elucidates tangible examples to illustrate the specific manifestations, impacts, and recent developments of the issue in Chinese universities, emphasizing the urgency and imperative nature

of resolving the problem. The third part explores innovative solutions, offering insightful considerations through the delineation of implementation steps, evaluation methods, and potential impacts of novel approaches.

Part 1: Literature Review

1.1 Problem and Background

Conflict between administrators and academics is a prevalent occurrence (Wang, 2014). In social interactions, conflict may arise when opposing interests impact relationships with others. A university is considered a social organization comprised of individuals collaborating to achieve specific tasks (Zhou, 2006; Rai and Singh, 2021). When examining the conflict between administrators and academics, Yu and Yin (2023) define university academics as individuals engaged not only in teaching but also in scientific research and knowledge creation within their respective subject areas. Conversely, university administrators wield control and decision-making authority over resources, personnel, finances, policy formulation, and other aspects governing the overall operation of the university (Rai and Singh, 2021). In the pursuit of their respective interests, conflicts often arise between the two groups due to differences in knowledge, values, abilities, experiences, needs, and motivations (Muthanna and Sang, 2018). Wang (2014) underscores that the root of conflicts among multiple stakeholders lies in the disparity of power. Academics possess academic power, enabling them to influence academic affairs, advance research and teaching activities, formulate subject directions, and participate in academic decision-making processes. On the other hand, the administrative power of administrators results from the expansion of the university's size and functions. Given these differing power dynamics, conflicts can easily emerge between administrators and academics (Muthanna and Sang, 2018). Wang (2018) highlights that in Chinese universities, administrative power typically outweighs academic power. The intertwining of political power with administrative power by the Chinese government establishes administrative

dominance in universities (Wang and Chen, 2007). Political factors exacerbate the imbalance in the power structure of universities and may serve as a primary driver of conflicts. In their examination of the evolving roles of university administrators and academics in China, Mok and Nelson (2013) emphasize that priorities are often influenced by the responsibilities and goals of their respective roles, resulting in differences. Academics advocate for the state and universities to create a more conducive environment where professors can focus on genuine academic pursuits (Lai, 2010). Lai (2010) reveals that the managerialist operating style of universities is diminishing academic autonomy and worsening working conditions for academics. Managerialism, grounded in efficiency gains, places university administrators in a position to prioritize output, efficiency, and effectiveness. The push for achieving more with fewer resources has led to widespread dissatisfaction among academics, emerging as one of the most stressful issues in higher education. Therefore, this section will explore the conflict between Chinese university administrators and academics through the lenses of interest orientation, political factors, and priorities.

(1) Interest Orientation

In the context of higher education, differences in knowledge, values, abilities, experiences, needs, and motivations between administrators and academics lead to different interest orientations (Huang, 2013). Interest orientation refers to the concern and tendency of an individual or organization for personal or collective interests in actions and decisions. This includes the motivation and direction to pursue, protect and maximize interests (Chancy, 2017). This may involve individual career development, salary levels, promotion opportunities, as well as interests in the organization's financial status, reputation, market share, etc. Academics typically have deep expertise in a specific

subject area, with a focus on teaching, research and scholarly innovation. In contrast, administrative managers focus more on knowledge of organizational management, financial planning, and policy implementation. This difference in knowledge often leads to different perspectives and approaches to decision-making and planning. While academics have accumulated rich experience and demonstrated outstanding abilities in the fields of research and education, administrators have accumulated more experience in the management and administrative fields, characterized by organizational management, leadership and decision-making skills. These differences in abilities and experience may influence how they play their roles within the university, how they perform specific tasks, and how they view problems, develop policies, and manage resources. In terms of values, academics usually pay more attention to academic freedom, independent research and educational quality, and are concerned about research support, academic freedom and teaching resources. Instead, administrators focus more on organizational effectiveness, resource allocation, and the overall operations of the university with an eye toward financial health, effective operations, and achieving strategic goals. Such differences in values can lead to conflicts in goal setting and decision-making, causing friction in resource allocation and prioritization(Chancy, 2017). As for motivation, academics are generally more focused on driving innovation in research and teaching in their subject areas, whereas managers' motivations are more focused on achieving the overall goals of the university, improving efficiency and ensuring compliance. This difference in motivation also manifests itself in decision-making and resource management. These differences are not absolute, and different individuals may have different concerns and tendencies in these areas. Understanding and balancing the interests of all parties are important factors in building healthy, cooperative and sustainable relationships(Chancy, 2017).

(2) Political Factors

A university is a social organization whose power structure is shaped by factors at multiple levels, among which political factors are one of them (Drew, 2010). The government regulates the operations and management of universities by formulating policies and regulations, including funding, academic freedom, and admissions policies. This series of policies directly affects the power distribution and decision-making process within the university. At the same time, universities are often financially dependent on government funding, and government funding decisions shape the university's financial position and resource allocation (Chancy, 2017). This financial dependence allows political factors to play a more prominent role in university power structures. In addition, political ideologies and external political pressures are also interfering with university power structures. Political forces may exert influence by promoting particular ideological agendas, leading to a reconfiguration of power within universities. China's institutions of higher education operate under a school-main responsibility system led by the party committee, structured into three levels comprising the school, college, and department. Each level has a leadership core and multiple parallel functional departments, including academic affairs, scientific research, human resources, and finance. Party organizations, functioning as a political force, have effectively played an ideological role in power agencies at all university levels, underscoring their indispensable role in ensuring the correct direction of educational development. Nevertheless, the coexistence of two systems, political and administrative, raises administrative costs and presents the risk of bureaucracy, especially when administrative or teaching staff concurrently hold party positions. The dual system aims to regulate and control the activities of academics and staff, providing a high level of predictability to maximize overall effectiveness (Drew, 2010). By law, university ownership belongs

to the state, with the school's administrative body managing school resources on behalf of the state.

When academics receive wages and use school facilities, they are obligated to adhere to the school's rules and regulations. While this system ensures the rational utilization of school resources, it imposes significant constraints on academic activities. Within this framework, political pressure may result in the censorship of specific viewpoints and interference in academic decision-making, impacting the power dynamics of academics and the overall academic atmosphere of the university. Political factors existing in the power structure may trigger conflicts between academic freedom and political intentions(Drew, 2010). China's political and cultural background and unbalanced power structure make the tension between university administrators and academics difficult to eliminate in the short term.

(3) Priorities

Different priorities exist between administrators and academics primarily because they hold different responsibilities and roles within the university, with different functions and responsibilities. These differences often reflect their different understandings of the university's mission and goals, as well as different expectations for university operations. Managerialism emerged in the early 20th century and developed significantly, especially in the context of industrialization and the expansion of organizational size. Managerialism is an organizational and management theory that focuses on planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling organizations to achieve predetermined goals and benefits. Under this theoretical framework, managerialism emphasizes effectiveness and efficiency, making organizations operate more effectively and achieve more results through scientific management methods, standardized processes and reasonable resource allocation.

Organizations should set clear goals and drive the achievement of these goals through all levels to improve overall effectiveness. However, managerialism has also been criticized, particularly for neglecting employee participation and innovation, as well as for some challenges in dealing with change and complexity. This theory holds true in Chinese universities as well, thus affecting differences in priorities. In universities, administrators often focus on overall effectiveness and goal achievement, emphasizing financial health, strategic goals, and effectiveness. In contrast, academics may focus more on academic freedom, independent research, and the quality of teaching. Differences in goals between the two can lead to disagreements on priorities. Managerialism emphasizes efficient utilization and maximum effectiveness of resources, which may lead to resource allocation that is different from academics' expectations. Administrators may focus resources on overall operational and strategic goals, while academics may feel that their specific research and teaching needs are being ignored, causing conflict. In addition, managerialism often focuses on effectiveness and efficiency and may overlook the importance of in-depth research and academic value, leading to conceptual differences. Within a managerialist framework, academic activities are assessed based on their outcomes, subjecting them to heightened scrutiny and control. The prevalence of auditing and managerial practices fosters an atmosphere that promotes opportunistic behavior, contributing to a sense of frustration and exploitation among the academic workforces.

1.2 Key Theories and Models

This section uses stakeholder theory to assist researchers in understanding the interest orientations of university administrators and academics, while also considering the role of the government as an

external stakeholder. By comparing the management styles of managerialism and academicism, the conflicts and fundamental differences between the two are revealed. Finally, the conflict management model is used to provide some inspiring thoughts for solutions.

(1) Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory, initially proposed by R. Edward Freeman in 1984 and subsequently refined through ongoing research, holds paramount significance in comprehending organizational conflicts. Stakeholders, encompassing individuals, groups, or entities with vested interests in an organization's decisions or activities (Freeman, 2010), can be categorized as internal stakeholders, including academics, executive management, and shareholders, or external stakeholders, such as government agencies, customers, suppliers, and social groups. Freeman et al. (2010) integrated stakeholder concepts into strategic management thinking, underscoring that organizational success depends not only on internal operations but also on effective management and the balance of relationships with diverse stakeholders, who may impact organizations both positively and negatively (Laplume et al., 2008). The application of stakeholder theory involves several key steps, including stakeholder identification, analyzing their needs and interests, and assessing their importance and impact on resource allocation and decision-making considerations (Freeman, 2010). Achieving an ideal, equitable distribution is often challenging due to limited resources and conflicts of interest, potentially leading to misunderstandings and disputes among stakeholders. Managers, therefore, should not only identify stakeholders and their needs but also actively communicate and collaborate to prevent or effectively resolve conflicts that may arise (Freeman, 2010). Additionally, stakeholder theory emphasizes continuous monitoring and evaluation of changing stakeholder needs, prompting

adaptive adjustments and responses (Freeman, 2010).

This study specifically focuses on university stakeholders, according to Yu & Yin (2023), higher education involves various stakeholders, creating complexities in university management, including government bodies, university management departments at all levels, academics, students, parents, and employers (Drew, 2010). Henry Rosovsky, a pioneer in introducing stakeholder theory to university management, classified stakeholders into four levels based on their importance to the university (Hu, 2005). The first level includes academics, students, and administrative staff, holding key positions such as chairperson, principal, vice-chancellor, director, and dean, with administrators wielding considerable control in American universities (Rosovsky, 1991). The second tier comprises the Board of Trustees, alumni, and donors, deeply concerned about the university's reputation but exerting less influence than first-level stakeholders due to their external status (Hu, 2005). The third level consists of partial owners, including the government, bankers, regulators, and review committees, becoming stakeholders under certain conditions. The fourth layer encompasses peripheral stakeholders such as citizens, communities, and media. Although students are crucial stakeholders, their limited time at the university implies that their decision-making authority extends beyond their academic period. According to the classification of university stakeholders by Henry Rosovsky (1991) and Hu (2005), the importance of this study—administrators and academics belong to the first level close to the core, which illustrates that the impact of their multi-stakeholder universities is huge. The government serves as the third level and emphasizes that its relevant interests must be considered under certain conditions. Driven by the embeddedness of university management within Chinese university culture and party and government organizations, the government becomes an external external stakeholder, and researchers may need to move it to the

second level, or even the first level.

In the context of academic organizations, universities predominantly rely on knowledge resources, granting scholars with knowledge resources dominant power (Hu, 2005). Sun and Cui (2019) divided university stakeholders into deterministic (students, scholars, managers, employers) and potential stakeholders (alumni, donors, parents, governments, bankers, other universities, the public) based on the classification theory of Mitchell et al. (1997). Watty (2003), examining quality in higher education, focused on specific stakeholders, including government, quality agencies, administrators, and academics. This selective approach aims to focus perspectives on these four groups when addressing education quality issues, acknowledging the broad range of stakeholders in higher education. Hence, researchers can flexibly address specific research questions based on their individual research context rather than exhaustively discussing all stakeholders. Stakeholder theory assists researchers in identifying and analyzing conflict causes, providing valuable insights for conflict resolution and internal management strengthening. By combining the four-level classification of university groups by Henry Rosovsky (1991) and the classification of university stakeholders by Mitchell, R (1997), this study focuses on three stakeholders—administrators, academics, and government—to analyze the nature of conflict within Chinese universities.

(2) Managerialism and Academicism

The Managerialism and Academicism is a theoretical framework for comparing and understanding different management styles and value orientations in managerialist and academicist university environments. Järvi and Kohvakka (2017) used a comparison between academicism logic and managerialism logic (Figure 1) mapped institutional changes before and after organizational change

for the underlying logic (Figure 2).

Figure 1 Comparison between Academicism Logic and Managerialism Logic

	Academic logic	Managerialism logic
Rationality and legitimacy	Professional rationality Procedural legitimacy	Economic rationality Legitimacy by results
Values and norms	Communalism, universalism, disinterestedness, equity, neutrality, organized skepticism, academic freedom	Proprietary, privatization, performance, prudence, efficiency/effectiveness, strategic science
Internal governance	Collegial and democratic	Executive
Work integration	Loosely coupled between and within faculties/departments	Tight coupling aimed at enhancing organizational coherence
Focus of attention	Rules, inputs, responsibilities, duties and rights	Fixed/single goals, results, competitiveness

Figure 2 Institutional Changes Before and After Organizational Change

	Hybridization of logics before the organizational change	Pure managerialism that was attempted with the organizational change
Rationality and legitimacy	ML: Economic rationality, Legitimacy by results	ML: Economic rationality, Legitimacy by results
Values and norms	AL: Communalism, (relative) academic freedom within the strategic framework ML: Performance, efficiency/effectiveness, strategic science	ML: Proprietary, privatization, performance, prudence, efficiency/effectiveness, strategic science
Internal governance	AL: Collegial and democratic (in some faculties and departments) ML: Executive (in the university senate/rectorate and some faculties and departments)	ML: Executive (the entire organization)
Work integration	AL: Loosely coupled between and within faculties/departments	ML: Tight coupling (senate led) aimed at enhancing organizational coherence
Focus of attention	ML: Fixed/single goals, results, competitiveness	ML: Fixed/single goals, results, competitiveness

According to the explanations of managerialism and academicism in Figures 1 and 2, it can clearly summarize the differences between the two. In terms of value orientation, managerialism focuses on the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization, emphasizing improving the overall

operational effect of the organization through scientific management methods, standardized processes and reasonable resource allocation. Academicism focuses on academic freedom, independent research and educational quality, emphasizes the importance of in-depth research and academic value, and advocates the concept of academic community. In terms of goal orientation, managerialism emphasizes setting clear goals and promoting the realization of these goals through efforts at all levels of the organization to improve overall effectiveness. Academicism focuses more on promoting research and teaching innovation in subject areas, emphasizing attention and support for academic affairs. As an attitude towards resource management, managerialism focuses on the effective use of resources, focusing on overall operations and the achievement of strategic goals, focusing on financial health, strategic goals and effectiveness. Academicism may have more specific expectations about the use of resources, hoping that resources will support more specific research and teaching needs rather than just overall operations. Regarding the decision-making level, managerialism often emphasizes centralized leadership and decision-making power, advocates hierarchical systems, and pursues the hierarchical structure and power concentration of the organization. Academicism may be more inclined to promote the concept of academic community, emphasize academic autonomy, and expect more participation and joint decision-making. In the university environment, the collision of managerialism and academicism may lead to disagreements about the direction of university development and the use of resources. This different management orientation may cause potential conflicts within the university, requiring a search for balance and solutions to ensure that the university can balance overall operations and academic innovation.

(3) Conflict Management Model and Conflict Resolution Model

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model (also known as the TKI model) is a conflict management tool proposed by Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann in 1974 for identifying and understanding individual or team preferences and behaviors in conflict. The model (Figure 3) is based on two main dimensions, namely "cooperation" and "competition", which create a two-dimensional model of the five conflict handling styles.

Figure 3 Thomas-Kilmann Instrument (TKI) Conflict Model



TKI demonstrates 5 conflict types. Competing is the tendency of individuals or groups to pursue their own interests without regard to the needs or opinions of others. This style usually comes across as strong and confident. Compromising is the willingness of an individual or team to make certain concessions to satisfy the interests of both parties. This style focuses on reaching a mutually acceptable middle ground in a conflict. Avoiding is when an individual or team chooses to avoid or ignore conflict, often because they believe that dealing with the conflict may lead to unpleasant

consequences. This style emphasizes maintaining peace. Collaborating shows that an individual or team is willing to solve problems through open communication and cooperation, focusing on the common interests of both parties. This style emphasizes creative solutions. Finally, accommodating means that an individual or team is willing to accommodate the needs of others, often by making concessions to meet others' expectations. This style emphasizes maintaining harmonious relationships. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model provides a framework to help university administrators better understand and respond to conflicts between administrators and academics. Its use is not limited to senior leaders or management, team leaders can use it to resolve conflicts that arise within their teams, and supervisors and line managers can use it as a conflict management tool to resolve conflicts that arise among their subordinates. At the same time, administrators and academics can use the TKI model to understand each other's preferences in conflicts, so as to better choose appropriate conflict handling strategies. For example, when facing a specific conflict, two parties may sometimes need to compromise or cooperate in a compromise manner to find a solution acceptable to both parties.

Part 2: The Specific Manifestation of the Problem in Reality

2.1 Real World Examples

In the first part, the common challenge that Chinese universities face is the conflict between administrators and academics. The researcher explores the three driving factors of interest orientation, political factors and priorities influenced by managerialism. Among them, conflicts caused by different interest orientations and priorities are manifested to varying degrees in universities around the world, and the imbalance of power structure caused by political factors is quite unique in the context of Chinese culture. The unique characteristic setting China apart from numerous Western democracies is the dual system of government control over the higher education sector. Therefore, this section will introduce a real case study done by previous scholars to demonstrate the role of political factors in conflicts between university administrators and academics.

Wang (2010) conducted a field survey in China during 2008, visiting a total of 9 universities representing diverse categories, including 3 universities directly affiliated with the Ministry of Education, 3 under the Beijing Municipal Government, 1 private university, and 2 independent universities. This selection encompassed all fundamental types of general higher education institutions in China, offering a comprehensive perspective on internal governance in higher education and facilitating a comparative analysis of university autonomy across different college classifications. Employing qualitative research methods, Wang (2010) conducted approximately 16 semi-structured interviews to delve into the nuances of Chinese university autonomy. The interviewees comprised primarily academics (12), with 4 from administrative roles, and

interestingly, 5 of the academics held dual roles with administrative responsibilities. The academic respondents included 5 professors, 1 associate professor, and 6 lecturers. Among the administrative staff, three were situated in the Faculty Office, and one worked in the Finance Office. Furthermore, two government officials were interviewed—one from the Ministry of Education and the other from the local education bureau. In addition to interviews, 29 questionnaires were collected from staff at the sampled institutions, distributed as follows: 10 from universities affiliated with the Ministry of Education, 12 from those affiliated with Beijing Municipality, 4 from private colleges, and 3 from independent colleges. The questionnaires served as a supplementary source of insights from respondents. Wang (2010) dedicated his efforts to examining the interaction between universities and the government, employing a set of indicators (Figure 4) derived from the Carnegie Foundation (1984) to assess university autonomy. These indicators can be categorized into two groups: academic autonomy and administrative flexibility.

Figure 4 Indicators for Government Control on HE

Indicators		Academic autonomy	Administrative flexibility
Sub-indicators	1	Defining campus mission and objectives	Appointing senior administrators
	2	Setting admission standards	Hiring new faculty members
	3	Determining course content and objectives	Granting faculty tenure and promotion
	4	Setting student–faculty ratios	Determining salary schedules
	5	Setting degree requirements	Authorising travel abroad for faculty members
	6	Establishing new undergraduate programmes	Setting campus enrolment level
	7	Reviewing existing undergraduate programmes	Setting tuition levels
	8	Eliminating existing undergraduate programmes	Accepting non-state revenues
	9	Adding or discontinuing existing academic department or division	Building campus facilities
	10	Offering full-fee-paying courses or programmes	Deciding whether to seek specialised collaborations for particular programme

Figures 5 and 6 show the decision-making weight distribution of academic autonomy and administrative flexibility according to the 29 questionnaires.

Figure 5 Percentage of Respondents' Opinions on Location of Decision-making of Academic

Autonomy

Item	Department	Faculty	Institution	Government	Total
Defining campus mission and objectives	6.9	10.3	55.2	27.6	100
Opening or eliminating courses	7.1	25	60.7	7.1	100
Determining course content and objectives	20.7	48.3	31	0	100
Setting student-faculty ratios	0	3.4	86.2	10.3	100
Setting degree requirements	7.1	14.3	60.7	17.9	100
Establishing new undergraduate programmes	3.4	13.8	72.4	10.3	100
Reviewing existing undergraduate programmes	6.9	10.3	62.1	20.7	100
Eliminating existing undergraduate programmes	3.4	6.9	69	20.7	100
Adding or discontinuing existing academic department or division	3.4	17.2	69	10.3	100
Offering full-fee-paying courses or programmes	6.9	20.7	65.5	6.9	100

Figure 6 Percentage of Respondents' Opinions on Location of Decision-making of Administrative Flexibility

Item	Department	Faculty	Institution	Government	Total
Appointing senior administrators	0	3.4	10.3	86.2	100
Appointing faculty administrators	0	3.4	89.7	6.9	100
Hiring new faculty members	17.9	53.6	25	3.6	100
Granting faculty tenure and promotion	17.9	46.4	32.1	3.6	100
Determining salary scale	3.4	24.1	65.5	6.9	100
Determining welfare schedules	3.4	20.7	69	6.9	100
Authorising travel abroad for faculty members	3.6	14.3	75	7.1	100
Setting campus enrolment level	0	17.2	75.9	6.9	100
Setting tuition levels	3.4	6.9	69	20.7	100
Accepting non-state revenues	3.4	13.8	72.4	10.3	100
Building campus facilities	6.9	6.9	82.8	3.4	100
Deciding whether to seek specialised collaborations for particular programme	10.3	13.8	72.4	3.4	100

The findings indicate that universities in Beijing experience a higher degree of academic autonomy (Figure 5). Over half of the respondents affirmed that their university has the authority to define its campus mission and goals, nearly two-thirds believed that their university can make decisions regarding the introduction or discontinuation of courses, and all respondents agreed that institutions have the autonomy to determine course content and objectives. Most participants felt that their university could independently make decisions on various academic matters, including establishing new undergraduate programs, reviewing existing programs, altering student-faculty ratios, setting degree requirements, eliminating academic departments, and offering fully funded courses or

programs.

However, in-depth interviews revealed that despite universities having the autonomy to decide on these academic-related issues in many cases, the government exercises control by granting conditional autonomy. For instance, interviewees noted limited autonomy in setting campus missions and goals, as these are determined by the government based on the type of university and its predefined goals. Crucial aspects related to university rankings, such as admissions priorities, course levels, and the distinction between teaching and research universities, are government-determined. While higher education institutions have the freedom to open or close courses and departments, changes must be reported to relevant government departments. The content of academic courses can be determined by the institutions, but political courses, such as Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought, face stringent government requirements to ensure political control in higher education. All public and private higher education institutions are obligated to provide political training to students. Although universities can set specific degree requirements, these must align with the State Council Academic Degrees Committee's regulations. Decisions about establishing or eliminating undergraduate majors or departments are contingent on the type of major. Non-degree programs fall under the university's discretion, but any alterations to degree-related programs require government approval. A representative from a municipal university added that obtaining permission from the municipality is necessary to introduce any fee-based program at her institution. Interestingly, structural changes are not always initiated by universities; in some cases, the government mandates public higher education institutions to open or close specific programs in line with national plans. On the other hand, private universities appear to enjoy more autonomy in making adjustments to their school programs based on market demand. They face relatively less

government interference in creating or dismantling departments because they are not funded by the public purse.

In terms of administrative flexibility, higher education institutions exhibit less autonomy in comparison to academic-related decisions (Figure 6). The government maintains strict control over the appointment of senior university administrators, such as the president and party branch secretary, who are appointed by relevant government departments and the Chinese Communist Party. A distinct situation arises in private universities, where the president is theoretically selected by the school's board of trustees. However, signs indicate an increasing government influence on private universities. A joint policy from the Chinese Communist Party and the Ministry of Education mandates all private colleges and universities, including private and independent ones, to establish party branches, solidifying the party's leadership role in private university operations. There is a growing awareness of the Communist Party's expanding influence in private universities. Nevertheless, universities retain some autonomy in personnel management, enabling them to make decisions on hiring or terminating lower-level personnel. Faculty managers may be appointed by the university, and faculty members have the authority to decide on new hires, provided they cover faculty salaries. Universities also hold autonomy in granting tenure and promotions based on performance evaluations. Notably, public and private universities differ in their approach to underperforming employees, with private institutions more likely to terminate poorly performing academics. Although there is a higher likelihood of dismissal at private institutions, both public and private universities share the same appeals system for teachers. Universities have the freedom to formulate faculty and staff welfare plans, incorporating items required by social security policies. Concerning faculty salaries, universities can determine performance income and subsidies based on

individual and institutional performance, but government regulations determine the other two components—position income and rank income. Questionnaire responses indicate several issues under the discretion of higher education institutions, such as approving faculty members for overseas travel, accepting non-state income, constructing campus facilities, and deciding on specialized collaborations for specific projects. However, the government maintains strict controls over admissions and tuition fees. Government-determined admissions priorities and quotas influence institutions, and while universities can allocate quotas among provinces, the government exercises control over time. Tuition fees, particularly at public universities, face government restrictions due to public pressure on escalating fees. The Ministry of Education, the National Development and Reform Commission, and the Price Bureau determine tuition standards. Respondents highlight that any significant increase in higher education tuition fees could challenge the ruling party's legitimacy. The government also caps tuition fees at private higher education institutions, but they exhibit more flexibility in setting fees compared to public institutions, as they can revise standards annually within the specified limit. Interestingly, university autonomy varies among different types of higher education institutions. Private universities possess more administrative flexibility in appointing presidents and senior administrators, but this autonomy faces challenges due to the establishment of party branches in private universities, indicating increased party influence. Respondents from private universities express the perception of having less autonomy than public institutions, citing various restrictions imposed by local governments on issues like teaching materials and enrollment quotas. Despite receiving no institutional investment, private institutions encounter constraints from local authorities. Interviewees from two universities affiliated with the Beijing municipal government voice dissatisfaction with excessive municipal

government control, noting increased pressure to recruit more local students in correlation with their funding. Concerns are raised about the decline in student quality as a result of the growing proportion of local students who may not meet admission standards.

2.2 Industry Impacts, Debates and Developments about the problem

From the empirical findings of Wang (2020), it is evident that universities are subject to both vertical and horizontal control within the bureaucratic structure, with the ruling party exerting influence on leadership and management through diverse methods. Excessive government intervention poses a risk of constraining administrative managers in their decision-making processes. Direct implications of government policies and regulations impact day-to-day operations and management decisions of the university, diminishing the autonomy of administrators in campus affairs. Academic freedom may be at risk as independent research and teaching activities of scholars come under more direct government supervision. The government's influence on academics could extend to setting specific teaching content, dictating research directions, or enforcing mandatory political education. Furthermore, government interventions in resource allocation to achieve policy goals may lead to discontent among academics and administrators regarding resource distribution. The preference to direct resources to specific areas while neglecting others could breed dissatisfaction. Excessive government involvement may reshape the power structure, enhancing government authority in university decision-making. This shift could alter power dynamics between administrators and academics, escalating the potential for conflict. Simultaneously, heightened government intervention may bog down decision-making processes, diminishing administrative efficiency. Cumbersome bureaucratic procedures and policies may leave administrators feeling restricted in

effectively managing university affairs. Academics, in turn, may resent administrators for wasting too much time on non-academic responsibilities. Collectively, these challenges strain the relationship between administrative and academic functions, creating a fertile ground for potential conflict. Overall, extensive government involvement in university governance risks upsetting the equilibrium between administrators and academics, impeding university autonomy and innovation, and negatively impacting the entire education system. Despite this, China's universities have gained more autonomy compared to three decades ago, with ongoing government efforts. Influenced by neoliberalism and managerialism, higher education has undergone transformative reforms like decentralization, deregulation, marketization, and privatization, alleviating the impact of government interference.

Part 3: Innovative Solutions

Although, with the blessing of Chinese culture and the party and government system, government factors interfere with the balance of university power structures, thus making the conflict between university administrators and academics more complicated. However, it is impossible for a university, a researcher, or an academic to resolve this conflict driver in the short term. Reform of the university system takes time, and the intervention of political factors is not always negative. As a researcher, we must consider both the internal causes of the problem and the role of external factors. Internal factors such as interest orientation and priorities have been fully elaborated by the researcher in the assignments of the first four doctoral study courses. Therefore, in the assignment of the course Visions for the future, the focus is shifted to the external factors driving China's political factors. In terms of its particularity, it is to add multi-dimensional content to my original research to ensure the comprehensiveness of the research problem.

3.1 Innovative Approach

Let's get back to the research question itself. After analyzing the driving factors of conflicts, the researchers put forward corresponding conflict resolution suggestions based on interest orientation, political factors and priorities under managerialism.

Wang (2014) advocated the establishment of a comprehensive mechanism covering the administrative decision-making system, academic review system, democratic management system and decision-making execution system. The goal of this inclusive mechanism is to promote shared governance, emphasizing that administrators and academics have equal participation status and opportunities. This mechanism is regarded as an effective means to safeguard diverse interests and

promote a harmonious working environment (Wang, 2014). To establish an inclusive mechanism, consider the following steps:

(1) Develop a clear institutional framework: Determine the specific components of the inclusive mechanism and the responsibilities of each system, and formulate clear regulations for decision-making, review, management and execution. Enforcing clearly defined policies and procedures to effectively manage and resolve conflicts appears crucial (Peng, 2015). These policies and procedures standardize the conflict resolution process, clarify the distribution of responsibilities and powers, and provide managers and scholars with guidance and basis for conflict resolution. They ensure fairness and consistency in conflict handling, building a fair and trustworthy conflict resolution framework.

(2) Involve a wide range of stakeholders: Invite a wide range of stakeholders, including administrators, academics, and other campus members, to participate in the formulation and design process of the system. Focus on ensuring that administrators and academics have equal rights to participate in decision-making and management processes to prevent conflicts caused by power imbalances.

(3) Establish a transparent decision-making process: Ensure the transparency of the decision-making process, allow participants to clearly understand how the mechanism operates, and avoid conflicts caused by information asymmetry. At the same time, we promote the establishment of common values, ensure that administrators and academics have a common understanding of the university's mission and goals, and reduce ideological conflicts.

(4) Training and awareness raising: Provide relevant training to campus members to improve their understanding of inclusive mechanisms and cultivate the concept and culture of shared governance.

An effective strategy is to provide conflict resolution training to administrators and academics (Rai and Singh, 2021). This type of training helps individuals gain a deeper understanding of the nature of conflict, learn conflict resolution techniques and strategies, and provides them with tools for cooperation and coordination. By developing conflict resolution skills, managers and academics can reduce conflicts and effectively deal with potential disputes.

(5) Establish a conflict resolution agency: Establish a special conflict resolution agency in the inclusive mechanism to handle potential conflict situations in a timely manner and ensure that problems are properly resolved. Introducing third-party mediation, bringing neutral perspectives and professional solutions, can help facilitate agreement between managers and academics (Warters, 1995). This third party may be an internal entity, such as a human resources department or a conflict resolution committee, or it may be an external mediator or professional organization. The establishment of specialized committees or working groups to deal with conflicts is a common approach (Warters, 1995). These groups are composed of representatives of different stakeholders who are able to conduct research, collect evidence, and provide advice, thereby promoting dialogue and collaboration between managers and academics.

(6) Regular evaluation and adjustment: Establish a regular evaluation mechanism to check the effectiveness of the inclusive mechanism and make necessary adjustments and improvements based on the feedback results.

(7) Establish communication channels: Establish smooth communication channels, encourage campus members to put forward opinions and suggestions, promote information sharing, and reduce information barriers. Negotiation and communication are fundamental ways to resolve conflicts. Establishing constructive communication processes and channels that allow parties to conflicts to

systematically express their grievances is considered an effective way to assist university management in resolving numerous conflicts (Ndum and Okey, 2013). Transparent and open dialogue helps administrators and academics share their perspectives, needs, and concerns in order to work toward mutual understanding and solutions.

3.2 Evaluation of New Approach

To better implement inclusion mechanisms, universities need to conduct regular method evaluations to ensure their effectiveness. The evaluation of this conflict resolution approach should focus on a few key points to gain a complete understanding of its actual effectiveness within the university. First, it is crucial to assess the extent to which inclusive mechanisms succeed in promoting shared governance. This includes analyzing whether it achieves equal status and opportunities for administrators and academics in the decision-making process. The effectiveness of mechanisms can be measured by examining whether they help create a climate of cooperation and shared decision-making. In terms of inclusiveness, the assessment mechanism adequately incorporates perspectives from all parties to ensure that a variety of interests are taken into account. Pay attention to whether the system encourages broad participation and representation to ensure that decisions are comprehensive and fair. In order to obtain feedback from administrators and academics, anonymous mailboxes or online questionnaires can be used, and a feedback and improvement mechanism can be established. This helps to check whether the mechanism helps create a harmonious environment and promotes cooperation between the two parties. Furthermore, regular review of the effectiveness of mechanisms in resolving conflicts between administrators and academics is crucial. This can be done through post-mortem evaluations, such as written records, audio recordings, etc., to determine

whether the mechanism provided a structured and fair process for handling disagreements and reaching resolutions. At the same time, this helps to increase the transparency of the mechanism in the decision-making process, ensuring that the way decisions are made and conflicts are resolved is clearly shown. However, it is important to note that written records and recordings need to ensure compliance and comply with relevant legal and ethical standards to avoid raising greater risks and sensitivities that could exacerbate conflicts. Systematically evaluating these key points can provide insights into the overall effectiveness of inclusion mechanisms in resolving conflicts between administrators and academics in university settings, providing useful feedback for their continuous improvement.

3.3 Potential Impact of New Approach

The implementation of inclusive mechanisms may have a wide range of positive consequences in terms of conflict resolution between university administrators and academics. First, the mechanism helps establish equal status and opportunities, thereby reducing dissatisfaction and potential conflicts between different groups. By promoting shared governance, mechanisms create a more cooperative and collaborative atmosphere within universities, thereby helping to reduce tensions between administrators and academics. In addition, the goal of the mechanism is to safeguard diverse interests to ensure that the views and needs of all parties are properly considered, thereby reducing the occurrence of conflicts and improving the fairness of conflict resolution.

By promoting shared governance and equal participation, the mechanism is also expected to create a more harmonious work and academic environment, thereby increasing overall job satisfaction and collaborative spirit. At the same time, mechanisms provide a structured approach to conflict

resolution, allowing administrators and academics to resolve differences in a more collaborative manner, potentially leading to faster and more effective resolutions. Implementing this mechanism can also increase the transparency of the decision-making process, increase the trust of all parties in decision-making, and help alleviate suspicion and misunderstandings.

Ultimately, if the mechanism can be successfully implemented and achieve results, it may help build long-term stability, reduce the frequency of conflicts, and improve the overall governance effectiveness of the university. This demonstrates the potential positive outcomes of inclusive mechanisms in promoting harmonious development within universities and improving decision-making and conflict resolution.

Conclusion

Administrators and academics have different interest orientations due to differences in knowledge, values, abilities, experiences, needs and motivations. We need to understand the differences in interests from the perspective of stakeholders, thereby trying to balance the interests of all parties to promote healthy relationships. develop. The debate between managerialism and academicism has further widened the gap in priorities between administrators and academics, whose academic freedom is thwarted by quantification and rigorous scrutiny. As an external stakeholder, the government exerts influence on the power structure of universities through the infiltration of ideology and party organizations. Wang (2010) conducted semi-structured interviews and questionnaires on nine different types of universities in 2008, which showed that Chinese universities have high academic autonomy and low administrative autonomy. Excessive government intervention in university governance may have negative effects such as skewing resource allocation, affecting power dynamics, and reducing administrative efficiency, thereby creating tension between university administrators and academics. Under the three conflict-driven elements of differences in interest orientations, government factors, and differences in priorities under managerialism, universities can try to establish an inclusive mechanism covering administrative decision-making systems, academic review systems, democratic management systems, and decision-making execution systems to promote shared governance , emphasizing that managers and scholars have equal participation status and opportunities. The inclusion mechanism is implemented from seven aspects: establishing a clear institutional framework, involving a wide range of stakeholders, establishing a transparent decision-making process, improving training and awareness, establishing

a conflict resolution mechanism, regular evaluation and adjustment, and establishing communication channels. During regular evaluation and adjustment, the focus is on the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the new mechanism. However, it should be noted that when collecting feedback on the implementation of the mechanism, data management and personal privacy confidentiality should be ensured to reduce the risk of non-compliance. intensify conflict. Through inclusion mechanisms, shared governance and equal participation are promoted to create a more harmonious work and academic environment, thereby improving overall job satisfaction and collaborative spirit. This helps build the long-term stability of the university, reduces the frequency of conflicts and improves the overall governance effectiveness of the university.

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