

## The “new” type of private university in China

### The overview of private higher education in ancient China

The large scale of private higher education started around 500 BC in Spring and Autumn Period in ancient China. The representative figures, also the great educators and philosophers, are Confucius, Micius, Lao Zi, and Guanzhong, which have set forth Confucianism, Mohism, Taoism, and Legalism respectively in China. The Confucian has ruled the ancient and current China for thousands of years, and has institutes built all over the world. Micius highlighted the importance of technology education to develop and instruct agriculture, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, physics, and so on (Wu, 1997). Taoism focuses on the relationship between nature, society, and human being. Legalism is related to the legal construction. Subsequently, the private higher education had gone through different dynasties following ancient China, including Qin dynasty, Han dynasty, Tang dynasty, Song dynasty, until Qing dynasty, and it had cultivated uncountable talents and contributed to the whole ancient China (Wu, 1995).

### The current private undergraduate college in China

The contemporary private undergraduate college in China can be traced back to 1992 (Zhang, 2003), where it had 434 private undergraduate colleges up till 2019 (MOE, 2020), which is the second-tier of undergraduate education in China. The large scale of private undergraduate college promotes the economic prosperity, relieves the pressure of employment and finance for the government, of which it is impossible to deny its contribution. However, it receives majority of critiques, especially on the deterioration of teaching quality, the lack of staff benefits, the absence of teaching infrastructure, etc. (Xia & Yue, 2010).

### The traditional research university in China

China's research-oriented universities are universities focused on innovative knowledge dissemination, production and application, with the primary goal of producing high-level scientific research achievements and cultivating high-level elites (Zhao, 2009). They play an important role in social development, economic construction, scientific and educational progress, cultural prosperity and national security. The level and status of universities are at the top of the pyramid (Cai, 2013). The universities are involved in the 985 Project, 211 Project and Double-First Class University Plan in different periods (Cai, 2013). The research-oriented universities belong to the public university, all of which are built and financed by the government.

China's research universities have been dependent on the government for a long time and are lack of correct orientation of academic power, which limits the overall

efficiency and individual initiative of the university. In the process of national economic and political system reform, the universities' backward administrative mode leads to the deviation between the orientation of university and the benefit of society as well as the breeds of academic corruption (Li, 2017)

### The new type of private university in China

There is a new type of non-profit research-oriented university in China, supported by private funding. Westlake University, which is non-government and private university, was built in 2018 (Westlake University, 2021). Westlake University focuses on natural science, life and health, and frontier technology. Striving to make breakthroughs in basic research and original innovation, it is clearly positioned to become a small, but sophisticated, high starting point, research-oriented university, and thus the number of students will not be over 5 000 (Pu, 2021). The university was built by top scientists and entrepreneurs worldwide. Professor Shi Yigong, a structural biologist and member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, is the first president. Prof. Shi was once the tenured professor in Princeton University. During his time in Tsinghua University, he was the dean of the School of Life Sciences at the same time holding the position as the vice president in Tsinghua (Hangzhou Weekly, 2019).

The University has selected and recruited several leading talents and the young scientists with high academic attainments or academic potentials from the world (Xie, 2018). In order to recruit four excellent scientists in the world, the university invested 100,00,000 RMB (about \$16 000 000). The university invested more in staff living houses and environment construction, built world-class experiment labs and equipment to attract the most outstanding talents in the world (Link, 2018). Until the end of 2020, the university has recruited 13 professors and 141 doctoral supervisors from around the world, with the average age of the academics of 39. On top of that, the team has gotten some contribution to human public health issues at present (Personage, 2020).

With regard to the admission of students, the university only recruits the most excellent students home and abroad in PhD phase currently. For instance, in the school of life sciences, it requires the students to be physically and mentally healthy, where students should possess solid professional frontier knowledge, rigorous logical thinking ability, superb experimental skills, rich humanistic quality with an international vision (Westlake University, 2021). They should be concerned with the world and national issues, participate in problem solving, in order to contribute to the country and the world.

## The prospect of new private university

The new private university will promote the basic research area in China. It has only one Nobel Prize winner in Science in China despite of the long history and excellent culture of the nation, which means it hasn't had any breakthrough in basic research area, while Westlake University focuses on basic and cutting-edge science and technology research, adheres to the development of limited specialty disciplines, and pays attention to in-depth interdisciplinary integration (Xiong, 2018).

On the other hand, the university can get substantive funding support from top industries, government, individuals, and NGOs. The university can also transform the academic performance into industries, and undergo transformation of scientific research achievements, which can bring huge business profits and boost the economy of the country, while at the same time support the basic research of the university (Westlake University, 2021).

## Discussion and conclusion

Compared to the ancient private higher education institutions, traditional research universities, and private colleges, the new private research university is less intervened by the administrative mode and government in China.

The new private research university has more academic autonomy in university governance, has the cutting-edge labs, the most outstanding experts and professors, the most attractive benefits for the staff, and considerably potential PhD students. Thus, it can attract talents worldwide, as well as promote the basic research in China, and finally boost the development of the country and the world. This mode has long tradition in developed countries, especially in North America and European countries. While it can still be a reference to some developing countries, it focuses on the limited important subjects, sufficient funding and human resource, and advanced equipment to support the limited significant research, in order to achieve breakthrough and it is also a kind of American mode. For example, in 1987, the top 20 of 3,400 American universities spent 35 percent of their total research and development expenditure, and the top 100 spent 83 percent of its funding mostly on basic research. This shows that the United States fully applies the principle of concentrated investment in the use of funds for basic research (Huang & Feng, 1996).

Nonetheless, the basic research area is a long way to go, the characteristics of it are unstable, lagging, complicated, time-consuming, and high cost, the value is unable to be exerted in very short time, as it needs the outstanding human resources, sufficient funding, and the most intelligent scientists and the most potential students for such university. Whether the university can be an example to the private university and become one of the world-class universities to influence the world with the background of China, it still needs time to improve.

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