Building a Modern University System
-------A Case Study Account of Higher Education Reform in China
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Abstract

This paper reports a case study of reform and readjustment of the administration of China’s higher educational system. This paper reports key findings from this case study that is based on an analysis of the formation, contents and characteristics of the policy, “Outline of Ji Lin University JLU abbr. Reform of Administration Structure and Management System”. (OR, abbr.) It concludes by identifying a range of implications arising from these research findings for the development of modern university in a changing world.

Introduction

Brief introduction of the higher education in China

In 2004 the number of students attending higher education institutions throughout the world topped 100 million, with China’s 16 million students being ahead of every other country in the world. Knowledge production in science, technology, the social sciences and the humanities is being reshaped by the tens of thousands of bilingual Chinese students who are studying abroad. Great changes which have brought increased access to a university education have been made possible by reforms to the established higher education system and by providing more choices for post-secondary education. Clearly, such a massive reform project takes more than good intensions and considerable time and effort. China’s modernising economy requires workers with advanced knowledge, the ability to engage the shifts in the labour market, creativity and the capacity for life-long learning (Ma, 2003). The accelerated reform and modernization of China’s universities has sought to enlarge the scale of their operation, to rationalize their structures, and to improve their quality and efficiency.

Brief introduction of the present Jilin University

In June 2000 the China’s Central Government and Ministry of Education approved the formation of the new Ji Lin University (JLU, abbr.). Mirroring similar experiences as occurred in Australia a decade earlier, this new university was created through an amalgamation of five former universities in Chang Chun, the capital of Ji Lin Province. It was set up in accordance with the China State Council’s decision to reform and readjust the administration structure of higher education in China.
These five universities that were amalgamated included the former JLU; JLU of Technology; Norman Bethune University of Medical Sciences; Chang Chun University of Science and Technology, and Chang Chun Post and Telecommunication College, which were originally subordinated to Ministry of Education, Ministry of Land and Resources, Ministry of Information Industry, and Ministry of Public Health respectively. In August 2004, University of Military Logistics under PLA of China was merged into JLU.

The structure of this paper

The first section of this paper locates Jilin University's place in China's reforms efforts. It then provides background details relating to the reform of JLU's administration structure and management system. The third section explores the content of the reform that created JLU, while section four analyses the chief characteristics of JLU’s reform efforts.

About the “OR”

Background of OR

After the merge of five universities JLU successively there are many urgent problems and structural contradictions JLU has to confront in the course of development, which are attributed to some objective factors, such as short span of merging, no practical experience at hand to refer to, and lack of knowledge about the law for managing the mega-scaled university. For example, since JLU has scattered campuses, it is more complicated to administer, leading to the rise of cost for running and decrease in efficiency. And not reasonable organizational system, characterized as redundant offices and no unified power and responsibility, put some of the public matters dead corners; additionally, poor quality of some cadres and administrations’ interference with academic research largely restrict academic freedom and innovation, and grass-roots departments and schools haven’t exercised their functions actively for no smooth channel of power transference is available. In this case, the new CPC Party Committee of JLU, in the first quarter of 2003, realized that systematic deficiencies and barriers would certainly hamper JLU's development and they must be removed. The party committee of JU, accordingly, conducted vast speculative and meticulous work in respects of theoretical study and operational preparation, laying solid foundations for the formation of “OR”.

Legal basis of OR

To establish a modern university system fit for the condition of country as well as JLU, we must observe the current constitution and corresponding laws of our country. And the Party committee of JLU carefully studied “the Higher education law of PRC” and “regulations of organizations at basic
level in General Universities

**Ideological Basis of OR**

I  The core of modern university system is that universities ought to be self-reliant in operation and democratic in management under the government's macro-control.

II  The administration structure is the essence and nucleus of modern university system. University is also a kind of organization, possessing many of the same characteristics as other organizations like governments or enterprises. Meanwhile, it has its own operational law as a scholarly organization and a public service cause. Universities have their own missions, goals and pursuits; they value academic freedom and autonomy, focused on academy and restrained by academic logic.

III. The goal of modern university system we must engage in the followings: optimize the administrative structure, reform the managing modes, transform the administrative roles, clarify the working relations, refresh the working methods, enhance the profits of running school, lower the running cost, and attain a highly efficient system and good environment for running school.

**Operational Basis of OR**

I. Make sure the division of power and responsibilities

II. Open the representative meeting of faculty

III. Set up the Leading Group of JLU as well as an office of policies and regulations

IV. Kick off the reform on the way to operate a super-sized university

**The Major Contents of “OR”**

The “OR” consists of four parts: guiding ideology, essential principle, basic targets, and major contents. In the major contents are to clarify power relations, improve the administrative structure, better the channel for power exercise, reform the offices, personnel, and financial management, make sure the managing mode of each campus's affairs, and reform the rear service, etc. In terms of its aim, “OR” is consistent with the condition of country and JLU. The general contents of “Outline” are as follows:

I. Clarifying the Hierarchical Relationship within JLU

“Outline” identifies that the leadership and administration system of JLU are concluded to be a principle of 16 Chinese characters. To put is more specific, this principle takes the forms of leadership of Party committee, administrative authority, academic autonomy, legitimate authority of supervision as well as democratic participation.
II. Establishing an Administrative System Conforming to the Condition of JLU

We generally classify the public managements of JLU as four types considering the practical situation of spread campuses and gigantic size. They are respectively the vertical management, the extending management, the regional management, and the grass-root management. In addition, different administrative modes and structures are also made available, which can be found in the “OR”.

III. Regularizing the Internal Administrative Structure of Each College

For each college, an intern administrative structure, in which all the college-related affairs are open, decided on consensus, disposed of democratically and under effective supervisions. This is in consistency with the separation of power within JLU and aims at refining the internal administration of each college and implementing the policy of academic autonomy and legitimate administration.

IV. Directing the Reform on Each Administrative Institution

Based on the requirements of administration structure, “OR” designates the goals of the reform on each administrative institution for the purpose of high standard research-oriented university. These goals are four key goals.

1. To adjust the organizational structure.
2. To reform the personnel system
3. To reform the financial system
4. To reform the rear service and industries of JLU

Analysis on the Chief Characteristics of “OR”

I. It has fairly clear central ideas and emphatically presented theme

The “OR” clearly manifested what the leadership of JLU intended to achieve through reforming the administrative structure, i.e., further improve the deployment of power and responsibility so as to balance the status and relations of the colleges.

II. It is sufficiently prepared and pragmatic of the real condition.

The “OR” is an embodiment of the common will and a reasonable use of human resources. It presents an idea of academic liberty and democratic administration.

III. It is in compliance with law strictly and in effort to be innovative

Whether the making or the implantation of the “OR”, legality is always our priority, so to speak,
JLU observe nearly all the related laws rigidly.

**IV. It makes overall plans and takes all the factors into consideration.**

While holding to the ideal, it is realistic of the condition and probability, viz. the developing plan is based on the sustained development of JLU and the construction of high standard research oriented university. At the same time, the reality of JU after merge considered, the reform is carried out step by step with an either progressive or safe strategy.

**Conclusion**

With the advent of globalization and intellectual economy age, great changes have taken place in Chinese higher education, especially since the epoch-making reform that occurred shortly after the dawn of new millennium in China. It seems increasingly apparent that the reform of administrative system will have decisive effect on the destiny of Chinese higher education.

- The OR is doubtless a helpful practice in reforming the administration of university, which will provide some enlightenment for building modern university system to a certain degree. But anyway, nothing is perfect in the world, and the OR is not an exception either. It still has a lot to be considered and revised.

- This case study raises a number of questions for future exploration. How have the differing traditions, characteristics and existing conditions affected amalgamated institutions? Is amalgamation a goal in itself, or has it realized economies of scale and improved university contributions to the global knowledge economy? Has the merging of institutions reduced costs? Has the amalgamation of specialist institutes created genuine comprehensive universities? How can universities satisfy local needs while being increasingly integrated into global academic universe?
1 University of Military logistics
2 Changchun University of Science and technology
3 the former Ji Lin University (headquarter)
4 Norman Bethune Medical University
5 Ji Lin University of Technology
6 Changchun College of Post and Telecommunication