

**RESEARCH ON THE INTERVENTION REALITY, FEATURES  
AND COUNTERMEASURES OF THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT IN UNIVERSITY DISCIPLINE  
CONSTRUCTION**

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*In university discipline construction, Chinese government intervenes in university discipline construction by means of key discipline appraisal, 211 Project and 985 Project. From the investigation of the history and reality of the Government in university discipline construction and development intervention, the government forms the characteristics of transaction, nonequilibrium and fragmentation in the intervention of university disciplinary construction, but also brings many problems such as excessive intervention at the same time. Therefore, in order to solve these problems, the government much carry out limited intervention, improve the legislative mechanisms, establish effective macro-control mechanism, construct the whole government and introduce social mechanisms.*

*Keywords* Discipline construction; government intervention: the whole government; Chinese university

*Discipline is the tissue cell of University, while discipline construction is the lifeline of the university reform and development. As Newman said, the University refers to either students or disciplines. Burton Clark also believes that the University is organized around disciplines, while disciplines are the grassroots organizational foundation of the higher education system, are the basic starting point to study the higher education system and are the better end of summarizing the university system. Based on this, the Chinese government attaches great importance to the University Disciplinary Construction from the beginning of the 90s of the last century and actively intervenes in university discipline construction*

From the national level, there are “211 Project” and “985 Project” which are renowned at home and abroad as well as other main platforms such as national key disciplines, key laboratories and key talent base. From the local level, there are provincial and even municipal governments to intervene in University Disciplinary Construction such as the local key disciplines, key supporting disciplines and the most important subjects as well as other platform engineering. From the point of view of domestic study, construction in this aspect is still a blank of academic research. This paper aims to start from the Government Intervention situation in University Disciplinary Construction, attempts to analyze the basic mode and effectiveness of government intervention in university disciplines, and then points out problems in the university discipline construction so as to go forward with the valuable contributions.

Survey on Chinese government intervention in university discipline construction

Selection and assessment of key-disciplines

Key subject selection is the main tong of government intervention in university discipline construction. In 1985, the government promulgated the “CPC Central Committee Decision on Reform of Educational System”, which proposed “to build a number of key disciplines in plan according to the principle of peer review and preference to the excellent”

[1] Under this guidance, in 1986, the former State Education Commission issued “Notice on the declaration work of evaluation of key disciplines in universities”, “Interim provisions on the selection of key disciplines in universities” and “A few opinions on the evaluation of key disciplines in universities” as well as other related documents, which leads government intervention in the evaluation of key disciplines in colleges and universities. Besides, it is also the government intervention in university discipline construction by means of policy.

It published the list of national key disciplines respectively in 1988 and 1989, and selected out a total of 416 key disciplines. Key disciplines represent the highest academic standards of China in this field, and obtain the government.] In 1991, “State Education Commission

Advice on construction and management of key subjects in universities” was issued, and government intervened in university discipline construction in the estimation means. In 2001, the Ministry of Education began the second national key discipline selection in colleges and universities, and the Ministry of Education approved 964 key disciplines in Colleges and universities under the guidance principle of “adjusting structure, reasonable layout, preference to the excellent and fair competition” [4].

[5] The year of 2006 is a new stage of government intervention in university discipline construction. The Ministry of Education issued two documents of “Opinions of the Ministry of Education on strengthening the construction of state key disciplines”, and “Interim Measures for national key discipline construction and administration”, which specifies the management of key disciplines and strengthens the construction of key disciplines. In December of the same year, the Ministry of Education also issued “Notice on assessment work of national key disciplines”, which carried out the third assessment work for the construction of state key disciplines. Through three stages of evaluation, addition and first class discipline identification, the Ministry\* of Education approved the third batch of national key discipline lists.[6]

The government uses the selection and evaluation of key disciplines to directly guide and intervene in university discipline construction, and specifies and influences university discipline construction behavior through setting evaluation index system. Thus, all university disciplines have regarded this index system as a setting indication of university subject construction goal.

The wholesale discipline construction engineering of 211 Project and the local government

The 211 project is the means that the government uses strong financial support to influence the status and

influence of university and university discipline development. In social development and the eighth five-year plan outline approved by the fourth session of the seventh National People's Congress pointed out: "running a number of universities with the key point. Strengthening the construction of a group of key disciplines so as to reach or approach the level of the same subject of developed countries in science and technology." The former State Education Commission sent "Report of the implementation plan to build a number of key universities and key disciplines" to the State Council together with the State Development Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance (hereinafter referred to as the "211 plan").

After "China education reform and development compendium" came on stage in 1993, the former State Education Commission immediately started the preparatory work of the construction of "211 Project", and issued "A number of opinions on focusing on building a number of higher institutions and key disciplines" in July of the same year.[7] In 1995, the State Council approved the "211 Project" overall construction planning and opened the prelude of the implementation of "211 Project". The overall objective of "211 Project" construction is to make some key universities and key disciplines approach or reach the advanced level of international similar schools and disciplines through the government's strong financial support.[8] In "211 Project", "the key discipline construction is the core, which is an effective way to improve the whole level of the school."

[9] The 211 project is the beginning of the state to use "project thinking" and "key thinking" to intervene in and construct disciplines. Under this guidance, a lot of local governments actively follow up the national development strategy and begin to intervene in and promote university discipline development by starting a variety of talent projects, platform projects and key projects. During this period, many provinces and cities also implement the key discipline construction project, key laboratory project, key research base, academic leaders' plan and new century talent project, and so on. The government hopes the comprehensive intervention in university discipline construction in these "project" and "key" types so as to affect the direction, scale and level of university discipline construction.

985 Project and local high-level discipline construction project

The 985 project is a model that the government intervenes in university disciplinary construction through the system and mechanism creation based on the concept that "efficiency is preferent". According to Jiang Zemin's speaking spirit for the celebration of one hundred anniversary of Peking University, the Ministry of Education released "Action plan for revitalizing education for the twenty-first Century" and put forward prior development strategic objective and implementation plan of "creating a number of first-class universities and a number of first-class disciplines in the world's advanced level". In 1999, the State Council approved this plan. In this project, the government should "centralize limited state financial resources,

mobilize the enthusiasm from many aspects, proceed with the key discipline construction, increase have approached and have the condition to reach the international advanced level. In the next 10-20 years, we should make efforts to make some universities and a group of key disciplines reach the world's first-class standard."

"Through the management system innovation and operation mechanism innovation, we should actively explore the new mechanism of the construction of world's top-ranking university; develop and introduce a number of world-class academic leaders and academic teams, focus on building a number of '985 project' science and technology innovation platform and '985 project' philosophical social and scientific innovation base, promote the formation of a number of world-class disciplines and promote discipline construction." [11] Under the guidance of the National 985 project, some local governments respectively introduce priority disciplines and key talent base projects, and devote all financial resources to focus on the development of several schools and a number of disciplines. Some places also plan the provincial university development blueprint, and put forward goals of what university to enter the world's first-class level and what universities to enter domestic high-level university. Besides, they also plan the fund construction limit.

Characteristics and problems of government intervention in university discipline construction

The Chinese government has formed some characteristics in the intervention and participation in university discipline construction, but also has caused some problems, and these problems may even affect the sustainable development of disciplines.

Transaction of government intervention

The process of government intervention in university discipline construction contains not only the political intervention but also transactional intervention. In the era of the planned economy, subtle changes within the disciplines are likely to be subject to the stronger political and administrative double pressure of the government. In *Review of History*, Huazhong University of Science and Technology principal Mr. Zhu Jiushi recalled the tortuous development process of Chinese higher education and his feeling to participate in the construction of this university, among which the deepest feeling is the powerful political interference and excessive administrative intervention such as professional setting and title evaluation. There is too much pressure from competent departments, and they would be criticized by the departments in charge if they promote several staff additionally in the title appraisal. [12] Now, "left" political interference has ceased to exist, while political interference is also relatively reduced. However, in subject construction process, political intervention gradually transfers to the transactional intervention, for example, personnel changes, scientific planning and the purchase of large equipments are all subject to the government intervention.

Government intervention has shifted from politics to transaction, which reflects the progress of government

intervention model and shows that discipline construction is freed from the framework of national political tool and returns to the nature level of knowledge production. This transaction of government intervention in the university disciplinary construction process could reflect the government's emphasis on discipline construction, which helps to solve specific problems in the process of discipline construction. Some problems that could not be solved only with the power of discipline itself could be solved soon once there is the government intervention. However, on the other hand, it also has an adverse impact on discipline construction: first, the subject is placed in a subordinate position in the transactional management of government, academic authority is subordinate to the executive power, and it is not conducive to the formation of the academic atmosphere. Second, the government departments put too much energy on transaction management and lack energy to think about the overall situation so as to influence government's decision-making level.

#### Non-equilibrium of government intervention

Non-equilibrium of government intervention means that the government has too much intervention in some institution construction but has less intervention or omission in others in the discipline construction process. New institutionalism sociology theory thinks that the reason why certain institutional arrangements can bring legitimacy and social adaptability is that it forms the community between the state, society and actors through the specific practice mode so as to solve the common problem together. In other words, there is a common goal between the state, society and actors, so that they could reach a tacit understanding in the action way, which requires that the state should adopt common strategies and concerted actions with government and actors.

However, from the Chinese government's intervention in the discipline construction, the government simply exerts their own national goals and value choices to the school but doesn't pay enough attention to the coordination of these goals and selections with the discipline itself as well as the discipline itself need so as to form such a nonequilibrium. Specific performances are: more control, less service; too much occupation, too little collaboration; excessive transaction management, less strategic management. Disequilibrium intervention of the government is a selective and focused intervention. If the intervention focus is defined well, it is an entirely reasonable intervention way. Its maximum role is to give play to the government's strong administrative will and administrative power so as to bring more advantages for the discipline construction. As the largest defender of the social order, the government should intervene in a variety of illegal and individualistic interest games.

#### Fragmentation of government intervention

The fragmentation of government intervention in the discipline construction is a phenomenon that public services and functions between government departments are too refined and they can not cross with a serious lack of cooperation and coordination, so they have interest conflicts, affect the work efficiency and effectiveness of

the government and ultimately form the loss of some public service functions, while the overlap of some public services go contrary to the organic whole government. Its external manifestations: multiple management; fragmentation; divided policies, and so on/narrow vision field of understanding the questions, which is limited to the department perspective, the lack of an overall concept; decision-making and measures are limited to the department, self-contained, regardless of association of the decisions of the various departments, a lack of the overall concept; if there are conflicts of interest, sectoral interests are put ahead of the public interests. [14] For the University Disciplinary Construction, the service functions of the various government departments are too refined, and they only serve themselves for internal interests, so the government has not formed a unified development model and management mechanism. For example, for national key disciplines, from the national level, the Ministry of Science and Technology has focused funding policy, the Ministry of Personnel has key talent support policy,

Ministry of Education has key personnel training funding policy and the Ministry of Finance has key laboratory subsidy policy.

From the local government level where key disciplines lie, corresponding departments of the local government have relevant supporting policies. In addition, the schools of the key disciplines have corresponding supporting policies and preferential policies. There is no doubt that the government intervention fragmentation makes the university discipline construction investment diversified and discipline construction forces resultant, which helps the state and schools to focus on something so as to promote and advance the discipline's rapid development. However, this pattern has also brought a lot of problems such as marginalization of non-key disciplines, alienation of teachers' values and scientific behavior, lack of autonomy and the absence of subjectivity of the disciplines as well as the mismatch of discipline input and output.

This shows that government intervention in the university discipline construction forms the characteristics of excessive transaction, non-equilibrium and fragmentation and results in excessive intervention, whose negative effects are even more than the positive effect on the University Disciplinary Construction. If its negative impact is not controlled well, the government's expectation on discipline construction fails to bear fruit, but also it may make the university discipline construction efficiency low permanently, which hinders the development of the university discipline and even affects the achievement of the goal to create world-class universities and disciplines.

Governance of excessive government intervention in the university disciplinary construction

It is impossible for the university and university discipline to separate from the government completely in the past, today and even in the future, because financial support and public administration from the government are very important to the university and the university

discipline construction. Especially at present, the external environment of disciplines is undergoing dramatic changes such as global economic crisis, further tightening of higher education resources, and fewer jobs provided by the society. These difficulties and challenges could not be solved by the discipline itself definitely and they must rely on the government intervention.

Socio-economic development in the future is no longer the need of government intervention or not, and it is impossible to talk about the autonomy of the disciplines ideally, for government intervention has become necessary, and to take the initiative to seek help and accept government intervention will be the inevitable choice in discipline construction. Domestic and international experience shows that the discipline construction can not be separated from the government forces and rely entirely on its own strength and the government's effective intervention in the discipline construction is the necessary force of discipline development. However, government intervention is absolutely not the control of the disciplines, and the role of government is limited. Therefore, the effective intervention of the government must consider the boundaries of intervention. Only when the government plays the aiding role within reasonable boundaries, it can be conducive to the development of the disciplines.

Currently, Chinese *Education Act* and *Higher Education Act* and other laws and regulations do not contain related provisions to constrain the behavior of the government's intervention in higher education. That is, from the legal point of view, the government has the right to intervene in the construction of the university disciplines, which is precisely the power of the government given by national law. However, from a practical point of view, the role of government is limited, both the pros and cons of government intervention in subjects are simultaneous, therefore, it is necessary to consider the boundaries of government's intervention in the disciplinary construction. The boundaries of government intervention in the discipline construction should be shown in the following figure:

According to the above figure, in the field of education, the government can intervene in knowledge teaching related to ideology so as to cultivate correct values and world view such as Mao Zedong thought, Deng Xiaoping theory, "Three Represents" and scientific outlook on development, but the relevant scientific knowledge teaching should give discipline autonomy and allow the discipline to make a decision independently. At the same time, the teaching of government intervention in relevant ideology knowledge should not damage the teaching freedom, similarly, science knowledge teaching should also obey the basic political principles, while both discipline and government should not cross the line.

In the field of scientific research, the government could intervene in knowledge production related to people's livelihood and national interest, but it should completely hand the study of some basic knowledge and general knowledge to the subject for independent development. Besides, government's intervention in

practical knowledge cannot damage the independence of disciplines and scientific research is relatively autonomy, for example, it could not violate the basic human ethics and violate national law. In the field of social services, the government could intervene in discipline construction according to the need of national interest so as to ensure the priority needs of state and nation and also avoid excessive impact of disciplines by the commercialization and marketization. However, this kind of behavior must not damage the market rules and interdisciplinary free competition which is

regarded as the criterion, while the subjects can compete freely under the market rules in order to provide superior social services. In the field of cultural exchanges, the government can guide and intervene in subjects for the dissemination of national culture and political culture, at the same time, it should not make obstacles for the subject culture communication. Conversely, it should promote the disciplines to participate in all communications of human civilization achievement.

To perfect legislation mechanism so as to overcome the negative effects brought by the transaction of government's intervention in the discipline construction

The transaction of government's intervention in the discipline largely lies in the freedom of government's intervention acts and refine management as well as less external constraint of the government. Therefore, it is necessary to perfect legislation mechanism and ban the field that the government should not intervene in in the form of laws and regulations so as to overcome the negative effects brought by the transaction of government's intervention in the discipline construction.

The perfection of law' and system is the premise to standardize the government's intervention in the discipline construction. The intervention behavior of government must base on laws and regulations. For the government, if the law does not expressly grant it to perform, the government should prohibit the implementation, and the administrative power can not cross the law; for the subject, if the law does not prohibit the behavior, it has the right to act. Therefore, higher education legislation mechanism should make clear specific powers of government in the discipline construction as soon as possible.

The use of laws and regulations to regulate the discipline development is the manifestation of the use of government authority, and such mandator' ways define the boundaries of discipline autonomy. The greater mandatory scope the government provides, the less autonomy it leaves to the discipline. However, to easily negate the role of this government function is not appropriate, the laws and regulations clearly show the basic norms of disciplines, standardize the basic behavior of the subjects, and make clear the relationship between the subjects and the government and other external environment so as to maintain the healthy development of disciplines. Only it strictly regulates the government's permission, it could reduce the government's cross-border behavior so as to protect the autonomy of the discipline and make the discipline positively.

The establishment of effective macro-control mechanism to avoid the negative impact brought by the non-equilibrium of government intervention

From the Chinese government's intervention in the discipline construction, the government simply exerts their own national goals and value choices to the school but doesn't pay enough attention to the coordination of these goals and selections with the discipline itself as well as the discipline itself's need so as to form such a non-equilibrium. Specific performances are: more control, less service; too much occupation, too little collaboration; excessive transaction management, less strategic management. Chinese key disciplines construction, "211" Project and "985" Project are all non-balanced intervention policies. From Chinese and Japanese achievements summarized above, such policies are in line with current national conditions, but how to avoid the negative impact of the non-equilibrium is a problem worthy of concern in the implementation process of the policy. Based on this, the establishment of a series of macro-control mechanisms is an effective path.

#### Planning mechanism

On the basis of the scientific predictions and in-depth investigation and study, government should rely on subjects' development needs, organize the negotiation of all aspects which reflect the wishes of the government, work out global development plan and focus on national and regional coordination work so as to make subjects operate autonomously according to their actual situation and enable the discipline development to serve the country's overall goal.

#### Funding mechanism

The financial support of the government on disciplines is the responsibility of the government to undertake public education services, and the government takes the funding appropriation as a lever to balance and guide the development strategy and development direction of the discipline through project bidding, appropriation, funding, incentives, etc.

#### Oversight mechanism

Oversight and evaluation means of the subjects are diverse. The government lies in the external environment of the disciplines and is the main provider of the resources required by the subject development, of course, it can become the monitoring and evaluation party, but assessment and supervision can also be achieved by discipline's self-monitoring, self-evaluation and non-governmental organization's monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, the government's monitoring and evaluation should focus on methods and classification guidance. For example, English royal inspection system rarely uses the unified assessment program, puts more focus on finding out the weak links of universities, and then puts forward appropriate improvement recommendations and measures for these weaknesses. For discipline, it has its own characteristics, so the government monitoring and evaluation also can not implement a unified standard.

It can be seen from the dynamic analysis of the subject that, the internal developments needs and the disciplines is only the internal development needs, and the external environment together so as to achieve the goal of

the discipline development can not escape the impact of the external environment from beginning to end including the social needs and market signals. Government can make use of the information guidance, transfer domestic and international development experience of disciplines, analyze and provide data to guide the disciplines for development forecast, provide information of social talent demand and scientific and technological needs for discipline and also link disciplines with the externsistence between the subject development and social development.

To construct the whole government and introduce the social mechanisms so as to reduce the negative impact of the "fragmentation" of government intervention on the University Disciplinary Construction

The negative impact of the "fragmentation" of government intervention on the University Disciplinary Construction is self-evident. Governance of this govern the negative impact of the government management "fragmentation" on the University Disciplinary Construction needs the effective adjustment and organic coordination of the government and the society. Besides, it should further focus on foreign government's management reform trend and learn from the successful experience of domestic governance.

To establish a collaborative philosophy and to build the management mode of whole government Government management "fragmentation" has a negative impact on the University Disciplinary Construction. At the government level, the root is that there is something wrong with the cooperation and coordination between government departments. Therefore, how to establish a coordinated and integrated government management is a priority. The direction of the foreign government management reform is resorting to the establishment of an "whole government" management model. The so-called "Whole of Government" (WOG) refers to a government governance model to achieve the expected benefits through the thought and action of horizontal and vertical coordination, which includes four aspects: to exclude policy scenarios of mutual destruction and corrosion; to jointly use scarce resources better; to promote unity and cooperation of different stakeholders in certain policy areas: to provide seamless rather than separate services for citizens. [15] Therefore, we think that the reconstruction of the whole government management mode must start from the following aspects:

First, in the value orientation, government departments should vigorously spread the "whole government" thought, establish the concept of collaborative innovation, broaden the range of existing government management functions, focus on the interface between the various management and promote social equity and justice so as to strive to build a more collaborative government management system.

Second, in the organization structure? It should establish a large department system of "large-scale organization and a wide range of functions" so as to integrate and merge similar government functions in the various departments and perfect coordination and cooperation mechanism among departments, which

could solve many problems fundamentally such as organization overlap and weak leadership and also make the information public and shared so as to ultimately enable the government to form the organizational structure consistent with the requirements of “whole government”.

Third, in the way of supplying, they should pay attention to the management subjects such as education, science and technology, finance, personnel and other departments to form cross-sector partnerships and provide seamless management through the multi-subject joint. That is to say, in the management of University Disciplinary Construction, they should take the actual needs of discipline construction as the guidance, focus on the use of market and non-market management measures in accordance with the requirements of the coordinated development of the key and non-key disciplines and also implement the government management’s coordinated supply so as to establish a truly seamless government management supply mode.

Construction of the buffer organization between the government and university so as to change the direct management of government

Government intervention “fragmentation” has two subjects in the influence of university disciplinary construction: the government and university disciplines. Moreover, each of them will strive to safeguard their own interests to maximize their own interests. Therefore, the society as a “bystander” need an action to coordinate the relationship between the two and prompt their mutual restraint in order to decrease the negative impact of government management “fragmentation” on the university disciplinary construction.

Buffer organization is the best choice to coordinate the relationship between government and university disciplines. Buffer organization has “buffer” functions between the government and universities: First, it puts pressure on the government on behalf of colleges and universities so as to have an impact on government policy; second, as a Para-political organization, it is responsible for the implementation of the government decision-making so as to contribute to the completion of the mandate issued by the government; third, it provides services especially for individuals.

In order to decrease the negative effects of the government management “fragmentation” on the University Disciplinary Construction, it should establish some buffer organizations of assessment, funding, consulting and information services as well as other types so as to prevent the government’s administrative control of the University Disciplinary Construction and the whole staff in the full orientation and in the whole process, which could avoid the loss of due independence of universities and their university disciplines. After the establishment of buffer organizations, government hands the affairs and functions of the originally direct management of discipline construction to the buffer organizations to perform and complete, while the

government only plays the helm role in the macro-policy support, information services and supervision. Moreover, it also hands some specific rowing affairs to the buffer organization. Only in this way, it could avoid the direct intervention of the government in the university disciplinary construction in order to alleviate the negative impact of government fragmentation on the university disciplinary construction.

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Рецензент: профессор Грач В.В.