

# Research on How to Cultivate an Excellent and Profound University Culture

## From the Perspective of Building a Cultural China

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**Abstract**—University culture, which embodies the spirit of a university, determines what a university will be as well as its quality. Therefore, a culturally-loaded university has far more positive influence on the society than other social organizations. Hence, to develop the socialist culture with Chinese characteristics so as to build a cultural China, the educators should give priority to the nurturing of excellent and profound university cultures.

**Keywords**—university culture; excellent and profound university culture; culture China

### I. INTRODUCTION

As early as in ancient China, there was a well-known motto which elaborated the goal of setting up Universities: “The purpose of setting up universities is to develop and expand the good qualities, encourage people to bring forth the new through the old as well as to bring them to a state of perfection.” The modern colleges and universities, as a kind of social organization which targets at imparting knowledge and cultivating talents, is particularly a cultural and mental existence. They undertake the sacred mission of cultural inheritance and innovation as well as direct social culture development. It is predicted that in the future, the competitions among colleges and universities will be essentially connotative rather than denotative. Activities in college and university are virtually a kind of cultural education. Moreover, university culture has already become the driving force in the university’s development. Hence, we must spare no efforts to enrich our universities’ cultural foundation as well as their quality so as to manifest the profound and excellent Chinese culture. That the prerequisite of making China a culture power.

### II. THE MEANING OF UNIVERSITY CULTURE

University culture consists of material wealth (school buildings, landscapes and infrastructure) as well as mental wealth (educational philosophy, cultural heritage, rules and regulations, and code of conducts) which are formed, accumulated and inherited through long term work and learning of those in the colleges, that is, school leaders, managers, teachers and students. Among the two kinds of wealth, the material one is the foundation while the mental plays the leading role.

In essence, higher education itself manifests the achievements of human civilization. It educates people through cultural transmission, inheritance as well as innovation. As to a university, culture deposit is fundamental for it to gain a foothold and development. Besides, culture deposit is what distinguishes a university from others. It is the source of advanced culture and the bellwether of social culture.

Different universities have different history and traditions as well as different cultural deposits which finally compose a special university culture after long term accumulation. Such university culture is distilled from all the code of conducts and matters in the university (including values, spirit, thought pattern, morality, quality, atmosphere of education and study). Therefore it is quite comprehensive.

University culture may exert subtle influences on every student. According to the minister of education: “To some extent, university itself is kind of a culture. The process of higher education is in essence a purposeful cultural process which aims at cultivating capable brains. All educational businesses like school services, teaching and campus environment management are fundamentally educating students through culture.” Hence, university culture plays an indispensable role in higher education.

#### The Distinctive Features of an Excellent University

University culture is a part of social culture. It is affected by social thought and culture. Meanwhile, universities can cultivate a lot of talents and impart abundant knowledge to students while being relatively independent. Therefore, the culture formed in them has distinctive features from the secular ones. In other words, university culture is the origin of advanced social culture. In the new and developing era, only when a university culture is truth-oriented, tradition-respecting and inclusive as well as have distinctive features can it deserve the name of “excellent university culture”.

#### A. Being truth-oriented

“University is all-inclusive. It contains all schools of thoughts in the world.”<sup>1</sup> That is to say: All kinds of academic schools and their thoughts gather at universities to contend for attention. Then different subjects come into being and get interrelated with each other. During the

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process of competition and merge, new ideas, new knowledge as well as new skills are formed. University is also a “distributing center for social culture” where various social values and thoughts spread on the campus and express themselves. Those thoughts and values collide and sparks may form. The well-educated need to examine and distinguish good thoughts from the common ones and then must rethink the good thoughts profoundly. They should never follow a thought blindly. Thus the decadent ideas will be abandoned and fresh ones can function well. That’s the source from which a university gets its eternal vitality.

The basic functions of university are teaching and scientific researching. With the development of information technology, it is more and more convenient to acquire knowledge and the cost is cheaper and cheaper. The increasing demand of information from students requires that universities and colleges make innovations in scientific researches and update the teaching materials timely so that they can enlighten batch after batch of students. Higher education passes on the essence of thoughts throughout the human history and fosters students’ view of the world, life and value. Such cultivation is quite pure and ideal. It is far from being secular. Together with academic education, it embodies concretely the progressiveness of university culture.

#### B. *Respecting the traditions*

Chinese nation has, from ancient times, built up a lot of good traditions and thoughts. The earliest description of Higher education dates back to a famous book on philosophy named *The Great Learning* during the Pre-Qin Period (BC770-BC221). Since the Han Dynasty (BC202-AD220), the traditional Confucian culture has been gradually formed. With the tide of economic globalization, Chinese culture is largely invaded by foreign cultures. New values, living styles and diets of the foreign countries such as Korea and European countries all have a great impact on the Chinese people. University, the tower of ivory, is also not immune to such impact. “Kidnapped” by the vulgar social culture, the university culture tends to be more and more rigid. Moreover, China is now in the period of social transformation when numerous thoughts collide and compete with each other. Facing such conditions, if Chinese people fail to keep attic faith in mind, serious social problems will occur. Thus, social and cultural construction has a long way to go. Speaking of university, we may firstly think that it can pass on the essence of history and social values. Many of the treasures in Chinese culture have been ignored during the process of social transformation. Billboards promoting traditional virtues such as “Filial piety and righteousness”, “courtesy, good faith and braveness” can only be seen on roads in Taipei City. Nowadays, fewer and fewer people have the patience to explore traditional Chinese arts like poetry and ink painting and so on. However, those excellent arts should be inherited and promoted. Therefore, university should undertake the task to pick up the “lost pearls”. In other words, studies of Chinese ancient civilization should be paid intensive attention to in the modern higher education.

When making innovations of university culture, we should respect while not limited by traditions. Specifically, we should welcome all academic thoughts and findings as well as encourage the critical attitude of mind. Academic debates should be allowed while authority worship and academic hegemony are strictly prohibited so that we can create an open equal and cooperative academic platform. We should also organize more academic teams in the universities and build a well-arranged school system. Cultural inheritance is the basic function of universities, while cultural innovation is the driving force for their development. Cultural inheritance and innovation are grand missions the era has entrusted to the universities. Fulfilling such missions is an important mental support for the prosperity and progress of society.

#### C. *Owing distinctive features*

In China, universities and colleges have sprung up quickly, which provided the society with many talents for the development of China. Since each university is founded under a particular historical and environmental background, it certainly has its special educational style and traditions. Moreover, it has its unique school spirit and motto. Nevertheless, many universities have received much critique from society that most educational institutions are established in an extensive model. That is, almost all universities have the same educational philosophy and also the same management pattern. Therefore, universities are urgently in need of distinctive features. The school motto of Harvard “Let Plato be your friend, and Aristotle, but more let your friend be truth.” is quite thought-provoking and reflects the traditional American spirit. It emphasizes equally “tradition inheritance” and “truth-seeking” and attaches importance to the quality of teaching; the school motto of Massachusetts Institute of Technology “Mind and Hand” also underlines the students’ theoretical and practical ability. When delivering a speech in Tsinghua University, Liang Qichao quotes the words in the *Book of Changes* to encourage the students there. (A gentleman should constantly strike to become stronger just like the evolution of the universe; a gentleman should generously cultivate to become tolerant just like the earth bears everything on it.) Then “Self-discipline and Social Commitment” became the university’s school motto, inspiring generations of students to abide by it. As a result of it, researchers in Tsinghua University have made great achievements for the modern China.

The uniqueness and distinctive features of university culture is accumulated invisibly through long term practice and experience. During the process of accumulation, all principles, regulations and managements merge together and exert influence on every one in colleges and universities. Hence a distinguishing university culture is formed.

### III. METHODS OF BUILDING EXCELLENT AND PROFOUND UNIVERSITY CULTURE

Soft power of Chinese Culture has now become a significant part of its international competitiveness. The university is the main platform for promoting the advanced social culture and fuels the construction of a cultural China.

In order to build a cultural China, we should strengthen the cultural construction and cultivate excellent university cultures so as to gain a competitive advantage among countries around the world.

#### *A. Set up characteristic universities and strengthen their culture confidence*

Setting up characteristic universities is essential for the higher education. A university's self-position is closely related to its features. When it has prominent advantages and distinctive features, it will find its right position and thus gain great development. That's because a clear position is the basis of a university. Each university is founded under different historical environments and has its particularity. The features distinguishing one university from others are formed through a long time of historical accumulations. Such features, at the same time, reflect the diversity of university culture as well as the diversity of social demand for education.

The uniqueness of a university could be embodied in various aspects of a university such as specialized characteristics, discipline structures as well as discipline characteristics. Such aspects, binding together, form an aggregation. Many famous universities have their own characteristic schools. Also such schools form only a small part of the whole university, they all have outstanding advantages. For instance, the Institute of Drama at Yale University has been on the top of the list among all drama colleges in the whole America. College of Chemistry and Engineering College at University of California, Berkeley (UCB) also has such advantages ; The competitive advantage also lies in the management system and teaching methods of a university. For example, the most welcome university among the Ivy League—Yale University has promoted an equal policy of enrollment, which provides a good opportunity for those who are excellent but in poverty. According to students there, those from different majors and of different genders are allowed to live in the same building so that students can get all-round development. Such management model, which follows examples of Oxford and Cambridge, is quite attractive and innovative; the competitive advantage also lies in a university's history, architectures as well as its geographical location. For example, Massachusetts Institute of Technology gains popularity among students because of its unique buildings. There are many other elements that can reflect a university's uniqueness, all of which are parts of the university's culture. Moreover, to cultivate a unique university culture requires the efforts of several generations learning in it. Setting up characteristic universities doesn't demand universities to be simply different from others. It requires that universities which have good educational traditions should inherit the good while strengthen its characteristics and keep up with the times. For universities which haven't found their uniqueness, they should find the right purpose and endeavor to become one with distinctive features.

#### *B. Promote cultural innovation and improve campus cultural tastes*

The university, as a "factory" or "center" which gathers and processes advanced educational philosophy, is the source of excellent cultures. It guides the society trend of culture development with its independence, openness, criticalness as well as selectivity. The new era now entrusts the universities with another mission apart from talent training, scientific research and social service—cultural inheritance and innovation.

Culture inheritance here means developing what is useful or healthy and discarding what is not. It is a process of selection among the traditional culture as well as the foreign culture. Facing the threat posed by strong cultures from hegemonic powers that possess high technologies, the traditional Chinese culture appears relatively weak. Thus the construction of university culture will face more requirements and higher challenges. Therefore, we should strengthen the promotion of traditional Chinese cultures and choose a right path of culture innovation. Moreover, we should stick to the principle of being all-inclusive and help students establish the core socialist values and their discriminability. We should also protect the position of mainstream culture and make more innovations on that basis. The innovations we made can either be original or compositive. College students should be encouraged to make more original innovation and put them into social practice. The compositive innovation means to absorb the good essence from different cultures and make a unique cultural pattern out of them. The ability to make such innovation is thus called compositive capability which is applicable not only to enterprises but also to culture innovation. Such is the effective way of gaining win-win development as well as a manifestation of the university's independence and openness under the wave of globalization. Only through innovations can a university avoid being vulgarized.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

University culture is a kind of intangible asset. It is not the tall buildings and vast area but the spirit and quality that make a university a good one. According to the original vice president at Beijing Normal University: "The students at Oxford and Cambridge often say that they are unconsciously influenced through a lot of conversations with the mentors, some activities as well as the surrounding environments." Therefore, the spiritual culture such as its educational philosophy, histories and traditions which embody its cultural uniqueness is of extreme importance for a university. All colleges and universities should cultivate both the students' sense of humanity and science. That is, when training students on their professional knowledge and skills, colleges and universities should also pay attention to get good humanity feel rooted in the students' mind and to create a harmonious human environment. That requires educators to nurture students' ability of independent thinking, the pursuit of truth as well as the spirit of criticism so that the students can be the main force to realize the holy "Chinese Dream".

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