

Research on the Relationship between the School-Running Characteristics of Private Colleges and Universities and the Development Objectives of the Government

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Abstract: The development objectives of the Chinese government have a guiding effect on the school-running characteristics of private colleges and universities. This paper explores the relationship between the characteristics of private colleges and universities and the development objectives of the provincial government, using Jiangsu Province as a case study. All the schools have the consciousness of fully considering the development objectives of Jiangsu Province when formulating the school-running characteristics. Their characteristics all contain some training methods, training courses, or institutional construction aiming at the development objectives. Most universities can support the government's objectives on employment and innovation. Only a third of the schools provide government support for science research. Private colleges and universities should make full use of the free and flexible advantages of private education, combine them with the continuous changes of policies and markets, and create clear, scientific, and dynamic school-running characteristics, in order to achieve long-term development.

Keywords: Development objectives of the government; School-running characteristics; Chinese Private colleges and universities

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1. Introduction

The main purpose of the establishment of Chinese private colleges and universities is to meet the market demand, which is the complementary force of public universities, under the jurisdiction of the government. Chinese government policies have a great impact on all aspects of the running of private colleges and universities, one of which is the school-running characteristics. The school-running characteristics include individualized enrollment strategies, which are determined based on the local political and economic development objectives, the education market environment, and the overall development direction of private colleges and universities. According to the series of reports of the 19th and 20th National Congresses of the Communist Party of China,

the policy on private education has gradually shifted from support to regulation. The school-running behavior of private colleges and universities will be further constrained. Adjusting the school-running characteristics to fit the government's development objectives can be a way to get the government better support.

2. Analysis of the current research status on school-running characteristics of private colleges and universities

2.1. The current research status in China

In view of the current research status of Chinese private higher education in the past decade, the research on the characteristics of Chinese private higher education mainly focuses on the overall construction idea of the school, the reform and innovation of the management system, and the function and role positioning of each participant. The research objects mainly focus on individual case studies. There are also some comparative studies between private colleges and universities and public universities. Additionally, there are comparisons with other private colleges and universities. Most of them aim to summarize the outstanding characteristics of private colleges and universities, which have a long history of running schools and great social influence^[1-19]. The National Leading Group for Scientific Planning of Education (2013)^[20] conducted a comprehensive study on the characteristics, positioning, and development of private colleges and universities, and believed that the government and its policies played an important role in the formation of the development orientation and characteristics of private colleges and universities, and these characteristics were not closely related to regional culture and economic characteristics, leading to difficulties in their development and unclear solutions.

2.2. The current research status in other countries

Up to now, studies on the characteristics of private colleges and universities in other countries mainly focus on four aspects: school-running characteristics and positioning, governance system and internal management, teaching quality assurance system, as well as school-enterprise cooperation and the integration of production, learning, and research. Studies have mainly concentrated in the United States, Japan, and other countries and regions where private education is more developed. There is a lack of relevant research on the influence of policies on school-running characteristics. In terms of school-running characteristics, private colleges and universities in other countries focus on the establishment of applied and practical disciplines and emphasize practical teaching and school-enterprise cooperation. Their aim is to cultivate high-quality talents with an innovative spirit and practical skills. For example, private universities in the United States focus on the flexibility and diversity of their curricula, while private universities in Germany emphasize practical teaching and school-enterprise cooperation.

2.3. Brief summary of the current research status

Overall, although regional government policies have a profound impact on the school-running characteristics, there are still few relatively relevant studies, particularly regarding whether private colleges and universities cater to the needs of local policies and governments.

3. Analysis of the relationship between the school-running characteristics of private colleges and universities and the development objectives of the government

3.1. Research objects

We selected all the private colleges and universities in Jiangsu Province of China and the socio-economic

development objectives of the Jiangsu Provincial Government as the analysis objects.

As of 2024, Jiangsu Province has a total of 47 private colleges and universities, of which there are six private universities, 22 private junior colleges, and the rest are independent institutes. We selected six private universities and 22 private colleges or institutes as the analysis objects. The remaining independent institutes are not in our scope of research because they have a special existence in China, such institutes are established by social forces and public universities. Their management methods and policies are unclear because their identities are vague. Some independent institutes have achieved independence, but are still not independent nominally, and some independent institutes remain dependent on the public universities that created them. Therefore, in any case, all independent institutes are still under the influences of their sponsors-public universities and have not fully formed independent school-running behaviors, so we do not take them as research objects in this study.

In order to better study the relationship between school-running characteristics and socio-economic development objectives, we focused on the time when the government changed its policy on private colleges and universities. On this basis, we collected the publicly available government development objectives reports from the official website of the Jiangsu Provincial Government of China for each year during the 19th and 20th National Congresses of the Communist Party of China, from 2017 to 2024.

3.2. Statistics of the number of schools focusing on the government objectives in their school-running characteristics

We selected a total of 28 private colleges and universities in Jiangsu Province of China as research objects and searched and analyzed the school-running characteristics published on their official websites. By setting criteria and assessing whether the school-running characteristics include similarities with “meeting the development objectives of the Jiangsu Provincial Government,” we conclude how many schools fully consider the government’s development objectives when formulating their school-running characteristics. Through the search, we found that all the schools have the consciousness of fully considering the development objectives of Jiangsu Province when formulating their school-running characteristics. Their school-running characteristics all contain some training methods, training courses, or institutional construction aiming at the development objectives of Jiangsu Province. From this point of view, private colleges and universities in Jiangsu Province clearly realize that it is important for their running of schools to align with the government’s development objectives. Only when they are aligned with the government’s development objectives can they get further policy support from the government.

3.3. Analysis of the development objectives of the government

Through the annual analysis of the content of government reports, we found that, in the field of education, the government has repeatedly set targets for employment, research, and innovation over the past eight years. For example, the report of the Jiangsu Provincial Government in 2024 mentioned that it is necessary to create new jobs in urban areas. The report from 2021 emphasized the need to strengthen the independent innovation capacity of science and technology, as well as to enhance basic research and original innovation. The same 2021 report also highlighted the importance of accelerating the construction of the Jiangsu Industrial Technology Research Institute. It can be seen that the Jiangsu Provincial Government attaches great importance to scientific research development, innovation training, and employment security.

For example, Sanjiang University clearly mentions in its school-running characteristics, “The school closely connects with the economic and social development objectives of Jiangsu Province, optimizes the

professional layout, strengthens the faculty, and deepens the teaching reform...” Taihu University of Wuxi has mentioned in its school-running characteristics that the school has a capital market research center for southern Jiangsu Province and an Industrial Transformation and Innovation development center for southern Jiangsu Province. Yangzhou Hospitality Institute mentioned “We proactively provide pre-service education, post-service training, and technical services for the development of the industry and regional economy...” Yanhuang Technical College mentioned that “it is necessary to gradually establish and improve the regional order-type talent training model...”

Whether it is the development of talent training programs specifically based on regional and government objectives, the establishment of research centers to serve local government needs, or the provision of required training for the government, it is clear that all private colleges and universities are highly aligned with the needs and goals of the government.

3.3.1. Statistics of the number of schools focusing on the government objectives related to employment in their school-running characteristics

We set and judged whether the school-running characteristics include employment initiatives and found that 22 schools fully considered helping the government increase the employment rate and reduce the unemployment rate when formulating school-running characteristics.

For example, Nanjing University of Media and Communication mentioned that “white yoga teaching practice bases and practical training employment bases have been established in media at all levels across China.” Taihu College of Creative Technologies mentioned that “We actively implement school-enterprise cooperation to cultivate high-quality technical and technical talents needed by the front line.” Jiuzhou Polytechnic College mentioned that it has “carried out multi-form cooperation with more than 80 enterprises and schools.” Suzhou Industrial Park Institute of Vocational Technology mentioned “fully meeting the employment needs of all students.”

Overall, among the schools with employment measures in their school-running characteristics, most improve the employment rate of students by strengthening school-enterprise cooperation, establishing practice and training bases, and actively carrying out vocational skills education, so as to achieve the government’s goal of increasing the employment rate.

3.3.2. Statistics of the number of schools focusing on the government objectives related to scientific research in their school-running characteristics

We set and judged whether the school-running characteristics include scientific research and found that 11 schools fully considered helping the government improve the level of scientific research and technology when formulating school-running characteristics. Compared with private colleges and institutes, private universities pay more attention to scientific research. Among the 11 schools that emphasize scientific research, five private universities attached great importance to scientific research in school-running characteristics, accounting for 83.3% of all the private universities in this group. The remaining six schools focused on scientific research are private colleges and institutes, accounting for 27.3% of the total private colleges and institutes.

For example, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University mentioned in its characteristics that “Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University takes the development direction of creating a research-oriented international university, integrates the resources of the three universities in the two countries, and serves the local economic and social development objectives,” “We have built a number of laboratories with international advanced level and a series of high-level research centers represented by the biological science laboratory.” Nantong Institute of Technology mentioned: “teaching and production, teaching and scientific research, teaching and local

economy and society close integration.” Jiuzhou Polytechnic College mentioned that “We have established the Jiangsu Province Engineering Technology Research Center–Jiangsu Province Higher Vocational Colleges Prefabricated Underground Pipe Corridor Engineering Technology Research and Development Center, as well as the Municipal Engineering Technology Research Center–Xuzhou Prefabricated Building Information Cloud Engineering Technology Research Center.” Suqian Zeda Vocational and Technical College mentioned: “We have five science and innovation platforms and three science and innovation teams, and have been approved a number of national research projects and provincial and ministerial research projects in the past five years.”

In terms of running schools, the capital investment of private universities is indeed higher than that of private colleges and institutes, so private universities also have more funds to improve their scientific research capabilities. Moreover, private universities take public universities as their development goals, so private universities pay more attention to scientific research than junior colleges like public universities.

3.3.3. Statistics of the number of schools focusing on the government objectives related to innovation in their school-running characteristics

We set and judged whether the school-running characteristics include innovation and found that 23 schools fully considered helping the government enhance the innovation practice skill training.

For example, Duke Kunshan University mentioned in its characteristics that “a world-class faculty that combines student development with innovative scholarship and research in the spirit of serving society with knowledge. To foster curiosity, passion, and a spirit of truth, to develop excellent research skills, willingness and ability to come up with creative and rational solutions to complex problems and challenges.” Silicon Lake Vocational and Technical College mentioned “We adhere to cultivate high-quality, composite technical talents who possess innovative and entrepreneurial spirits and abilities.” Kunshan Dengyun College of Science and Technology mentioned that “We have established deep cooperation with Kunshan High-tech Group to build science and education innovation base, cultivate strategic emerging industries, train elite high-skilled talents, and promote the development of education, science and technology and industry.”

The majority of schools still attach great importance to the cultivation of students’ innovative abilities. They mainly carry out innovation ability training courses, establish innovation practice bases, guide students to participate in innovation competitions, and jointly establish innovation training with enterprises to help the government achieve the development objective of improving innovation ability.

3.3.4. Brief summary of the research focusing on employment, research, and innovation

From the above statistics, the vast majority of schools emphasize employment and innovation in school-running characteristics. There are 22 schools, accounting for 78.5%, that attach importance to employment and have a series of personalized characteristic measures applicable to their own conditions. There are 23 schools that attach importance to the cultivation of students’ innovative practical skills and have formulated a series of training programs, accounting for 82.1%. Compared with employment and practice, the number of schools that vigorously develop scientific research is much smaller, with a total of only 11, accounting for 39.2%.

There are two main reasons for this. First, the status of private colleges and universities in China is different from that of public universities. In general, the admission score of private colleges and universities is lower than that of public colleges and universities of the same level. These schools are primarily focused on training applied technical talents, as well as developing the quality and skills necessary for formal applied talents to succeed in employment and innovation. Therefore, most private colleges and universities attach great importance to the cultivation of students’ abilities in these two aspects. Secondly, the applied talents cultivated by such schools are often to serve the local government support industry, so they are closely linked

to the government's development objectives. However, developing scientific research vigorously requires strong financial strength, a solid scientific research foundation, high-quality scientific research teachers, and so on, necessitating large investments. With the support of the state, public schools are more likely to serve the scientific research fields needed by the government. In the development of scientific research, private colleges and universities need to explore a road of their own characteristics.

4. Conclusion

Government policies and development objectives play important roles in the formation of the characteristics of private colleges and universities. From the analysis and research of the school-running characteristics of Jiangsu Province private colleges and universities and the development objectives of Jiangsu Provincial Government, all private colleges and universities will fully consider the needs and development objectives of the government when formulating the characteristics of running schools. In the process of running schools and training students, schools will take many positive measures with their own characteristics to help the government realize the discovery objectives. However, according to the different strengths and characteristics of each school, the extent of helping the government to achieve the development objectives is still different. In general, the strength of private universities is stronger than private colleges and institutes.

The policy of the Communist Party of China on private education has gradually changed from support to regulation, coupled with the slowing population growth trend, the number of higher education students may enter a shrinking period in the future. It is urgent for private education to seek diversified, distinctive, niche, and standardized school-running development characteristics. Under the guidance of classified management policies, private colleges and universities need to combine the government's social and economic development policies, and dynamically adjust their own school-running characteristics to better serve the needs of local social and economic development, in order to get the support of local governments. Private colleges and universities should leverage the free and flexible advantages of private education, consider the continuous changes in policies and markets, and create clear, scientific, and dynamic school-running characteristics, in order to achieve long-term development.

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